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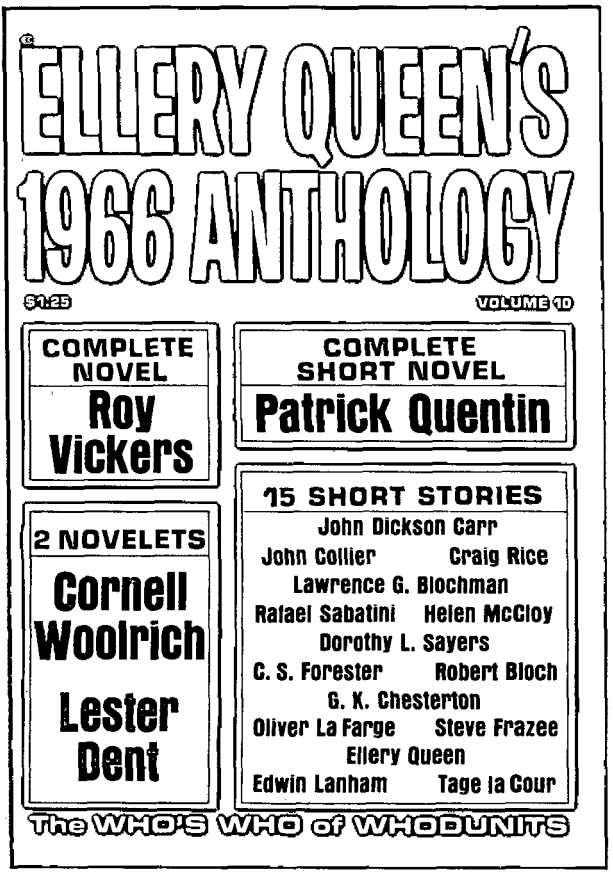

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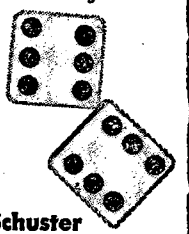

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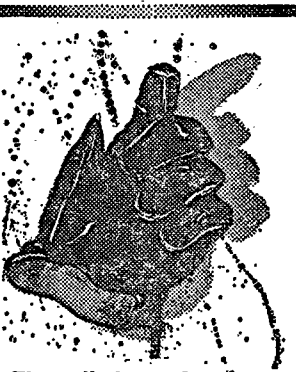

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Meet a new character—Mrs. Whistler, a retired actress who once played Whistler's mother. And what do you think the old gal looks like? Can't you guess? Well, imagine a little old lady with a kind and sublimely patient expression—truly a sad-sweet face; naturally, she wears a dark dress with a white, round collar and lace cuffs. But under the gentle grandmotherly exterior, behind the sad-sweet smile, is a 'tec tigress, a crusading avenger of cruelty and injustice . . . Merry Christmas!

DO YOUR CHRISTMAS SHOPLIFTING EARLY

by ROBERT SOMERLOTT

SHORTLY AFTER MRS. WHISTLER RETIRED from the stage, she discovered her true genius for escapades bordering on crime. But with modesty astounding in an actress, she has always managed to stay in the background. No one—except her son, Johnny Creighton—has ever suspected that Mrs. Whistler was the secret force behind several headline events that startled the country in the last few years.

For instance, millions of newspaper readers are aware that 267 animals staged a mass breakout from the St. Louis pound on Thanksgiving Day, 1959. Only Johnny Creighton knows that Mrs. Whistler engineered the escape. (The incident, headlined by newspapers as "Dog Days in Missouri," triggered pound reform laws in that state.)

Johnny was also the only one to know every detail of how Mrs. Whistler brought the powerful MacTavish Department Store of Los Angeles to its knees in less than 24 hours. There exists no court transcript, and the only memento of this case is an unflattering mug shot of Mrs. Whistler taken at the Los Angeles jail. Despite the atrocious lighting, Mrs. Whistler looks exactly as she did in her farewell performance on Broadway as the artist's mother in Arrangement in Gray, a role she became so identified with that she legally adopted the name of the character. In the photo she wears a dark dress; her white, round collar is visible, but her lace cuffs are not. Her sweet expression of sublime patience was not marred by the ordeal she was suffering—an ordeal for which others would soon pay heavily.

Mrs. Whistler had no intention of

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getting involved in "The Affair of the Capricorn Brooch." When she descended, unannounced, from the smoggy skies of Southern California on Friday, December 18, it was for the innocent purpose of spending the Christmas holiday with Johnny.

Still, the moment he heard her voice on the phone he had a premonition of trouble. Oddly enough, he was thinking about his mother when her call came through. He had been sitting in his two-by-four law office, daydreaming of pretty Joyce Gifford, who had almost, but not quite, agreed to marry him. How, he wondered, could he explain his mother to Joyce? Just then the phone rang.

"Johnny, dear," said a gentle voice. "Surprise! It's Mother."

"Mother?" His first reaction was panic. "Where are you? What have you done?"

"I'm at the airport. I've come for Christmas."

"Don't make a move till I get there. And Mother," he pleaded, "don't *do* anything!"

"Whatever do you mean, dear?" Mrs. Whistler was faintly reproachful.

As he battled through the freeway traffic, Johnny could not rid himself of the suspicion that his mother was up to something. But at the airport, and later in his apartment, her manner was so subdued that Johnny was totally unprepared for the events that followed. She's getting old, he thought, she's settling down at last. The idea brought relief—and a little sadness.

At 6:30 Joyce Gifford, her usually calm face white with anger, knocked on Johnny's door.

Johnny greeted her with a quick hug. "Hi, darling. Merry Christmas!" He lowered his voice. "I want you to meet my mother. She just arrived from New York."

In the living room an elderly lady was seated on the couch. Vainly, Joyce tried to remember where she'd seen her before—there was something hauntingly familiar about the black dress, the folded hands, the sad-sweet face.

"How do you do?" said the old lady. "I'm Mrs. Whistler." Joyce nearly dropped her purse. "You're upset, my dear," she said. "I could tell the moment you came in."

"Does it show that much? I've—I've had a horrible day!"

"Good Lord," said Johnny, "what's the matter?"

"Tomorrow I'm quitting my job at MacTavish's. Mr. Schlag can find himself a new secretary—if anybody alive can stand him! It was the most terrible scene! All over this poor pathetic woman they caught shoplifting."

"Shoplifting?" Mrs. Whistler leaned forward. "Isn't that interesting!"

Johnny saw the intent expression on his mother's face. A danger signal flashed through him and he

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tried to interrupt. But it was too late.

"I just can't tell you how horrible the whole thing was," said Joyce.

"Try, my dear," said Mrs. Whistler gently. "Try."

During the first 33 years of its existence, MacTavish's ("A Wee Penny Saved is a Big Penny Earned") had dealt with petty shoplifters in a routine way: first offenders were usually dismissed with threats of embarrassment. Otherwise respectable kleptomaniacs were delivered to their humiliated relatives. Suspected professionals were prosecuted relentlessly.

Then Dudley P. Schlag, nephew of a large stockholder, became Manager, and things changed.

"Once a thief always a thief!" he declared, beating his bony little fist on the desktop. He assumed personal charge of Store Security and would neglect any other duty for the pleasure of watching a terrified teen-ager squirm under his merciless, watery eye.

"There are *no* extenuating circumstances at MacTavish's!" By political influence and exaggerated statistics he induced several local judges to cooperate in his crusade and after each arrest Schlag called the newspapers to make sure the suspect was well publicized.

"He's inhuman!" said Joyce Gifford, close to tears. "Of course, thieves should go to jail. But two weeks ago there was a teen-age girl —really a nice kid—who took a little piece of costume jewelry on a high school dare. Mr. Schlag went to Juvenile Court himself and swore he'd seen her around the store several times—that this wasn't really her first theft. And I'm sure that wasn't true! A month ago they caught this old woman, a doctor's wife. She's been taking little things for years and her husband always pays for them. She's really pathetic. And Mr. Schlag had her taken to jail!"

Mrs. Whistler clucked sympathetically. "The quality of mercy is not strained," she said.

"Today Miss Vought—she's the meanest store detective—dragged in a woman who tried to take a cotton sweater from Infants' Wear. Her name is Mrs. Blainey. She has an invalid husband, and she's trying to support him and four children by doing domestic work. I just know she'd never stolen anything before. When Miss Vought searched her purse it was enough to make you cry. She had exactly forty-three cents. There was an unpaid gas bill and a notice that a mortgage payment on their house was overdue."

"What happened to her?" asked Mrs. Whistler.

"Mr. Schlag told her that if she'd sign a confession the store wouldn't prosecute. Well, she signed it, crying. Then he called the police. She's in jail right now—at Christmas time! Her case will come up Monday morning—"

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"And they'll throw the book at her," said Johnny slowly.

Joyce nodded. "Oh, that Mr. Schlag! There just isn't anything bad enough that could happen to him!"

Mrs. Whistler smiled slightly. "Oh, I'm sure there is, my dear!"

Joyce turned to Johnny. "You're a lawyer. What can be done about it?"

"Nothing."

"But, Johnny," she protested, "surely you can do *something!*"

"I don't see what. I suppose I could appear in court for her on Monday. But it wouldn't do any good. The sentencing is going to be routine. You'd just better forget the whole thing, Joyce."

"Forget it? I can't forget it!"

"Someone," said Mrs. Whistler, "should take action."

"They certainly should," agreed Joyce.

Johnny was suddenly aware that both women were staring at him expectantly. There was a dreadful silence in the room. He had never seen Joyce so angry or so determined.

"Hold on, you two! What can I do about it? I'm just a guy who draws wills and sets up escrows. There just isn't any use in getting mixed up in something that can't —" Johnny's voice trailed off when he saw the expression on Joyce's face.

Mrs. Whistler glanced at the tiny watch pinned to her dress. "My goodness! If you young people will excuse me—" She took a step toward the guest room.

Johnny saw the gleam in her eye. He was on his feet in an instant. "Mother! You're planning something!"

Mrs. Whistler smiled at Joyce. "Johnny's always so worried about me. Isn't that sweet? Good night, dears." Mrs. Whistler closed her door behind her.

Johnny turned to Joyce accusingly. "You've set her off! I can tell by the look in her eye!"

"What on earth do you mean?"

"You don't know her!" Johnny paced the floor. "Last year she took on Mr. Moses and the whole New York Park Department—singlehanded! Six months ago it was Internal Revenue!"

"Johnny Creighton, stop shouting at me! It isn't my fault."

"Oh, yes, it is! You got her started with this Mrs. Blainey story. It's made to order for her—invalid husband, four kids, even an overdue mortgage payment! It's right out of Charles Dickens. And tomorrow, you can bet, she'll try to *do* something to MacTavish's!"

Joyce stood up quickly. "Well, I'm glad somebody in your family has a little spunk! If she can teach MacTavish's a lesson, more power to her!" Joyce looked at him coldly. "Johnny Creighton, you're a stick-in-the-mud! So cautious it's plain dull! You're supposed to be an attorney, but—"

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"What do you want? Perry Mason?"

Joyce gave him her coolest secretarial smile. "Perry Mason is a very attractive guy. Good night, Johnny!"

"Stick-in-the-mud!" he repeated softly. Slowly a grim expression came over Johnny's pleasant face. "Mother," he called. "Are you awake?"

Mrs. Whistler's door opened instantly. "Yes, dear."

Johnny's voice was stiff with determination. "We've got some planning to do."

"Planning?" Mrs. Whistler blinked at him. "Oh, darling, I've already done *that*."

At six o'clock Saturday morning Mrs. Whistler bounced out of bed. Three times she stretched, bent, pressed her palms flat on the floor. Thirty minutes later she stood over the stove, dreamily preparing scrambled eggs for Johnny while she examined a full page ad that pictured items on sale at MacTavish's. Her son, still in pajamas, sat at the breakfast bar, his face a mask of stony heroism. He was convinced his mother's fantastic scheme would fail, but he was determined to go down fighting.

Mrs. Whistler pointed to a small item in the MacTavish ad. "One of these would do nicely," she said. Johnny looked doubtful, but nodded bravely. "If we can only think of some way to handle the last part!"

Suddenly Mrs. Whistler smiled happily. "Santa Claus!" she exclaimed. "You'll be Santa Claus!"

"Mother! No!"

"Johnny, dear!" Mrs. Whistler's tone was stern. "Please don't be stubborn."

"I'll go along with the rest of it, but I won't be Santa Claus!"

Mrs. Whistler sighed. "Very well, darling." She stirred the eggs thoughtfully. "Now, we'll rent a nice red suit, and with whiskers no one will recognize you, and—"

Johnny groaned and surrendered.

At 8:15, as Joyce Gifford was leaving for her last day at MacTavish's, her telephone rang.

"Good morning, Joyce, dear. This is Mrs. Whistler."

"Why, good morning."

"Joyce, I have a dreadful premonition that disaster is about to overtake poor Mr. Schlag. If you happen to see me later today—and you will—please don't recognize me."

"I don't understand."

"Don't try, dear. Just don't recognize me. Or Johnny, either."

"Johnny? You don't mean that Johnny's actually going to—"

Mrs. Whistler chuckled. "Still waters run deep. Goodbye, my dear. See you later."

At the height of the noon rush hour Traffic Officer "Spud" Battersby trembled in the middle of a terrifying intersection, blowing a whistle, waving his arms, and nar-

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fowly avoiding death at every second. Suddenly Officer Battersby's whistle nearly fell out of his mouth. A prim, elderly lady carrying a straw shopping bag was calmly coming toward him, oblivious of the screaming brakes and blaring horns around her.

"My God!" he shouted. "Get back! You'll be run over!"

A truck screeched to a halt six inches from the old lady. "Officer," she said, "I want to report a crime."

Battersby snatched her from the path of an oncoming cab. They huddled in the middle of the street. "You want to be killed?"

"Killed? Oh, no. No one's been killed. But my purse was snatched not ten minutes ago."

"Get out of here! Call the police station!" A red light changed and a wheeled onslaught avalanched by.

"My," said the old lady, "you are busy, aren't you?" She gave him a slip of paper. "If my purse is found, here's my name and phone number."

"Lady, *please* . . . Look out for that truck!"

"Merry Christmas, Officer!" Battersby shoved the paper into his pocket and managed to halt a hundred racing vehicles while the old lady made her unhurried way to the curb.

"Another nut!" he said. "A one-hundred per cent Los Angeles nut!"

At 12:45 Mrs. Whistler hesitated at the costume jewelry counter in MacTavish's, smiling at Miss Hefron, the harassed and yule-weary salesgirl. "Everything's lovely! I simply have to see every piece!"

Dear Lord, no! Miss Hefron thought. "Our pleasure, Ma'am," she said brightly.

"Look at all these pretty things!" A velvet-lined tray stood open on the counter.

"They're horoscope brooches, Ma'am. An advertised special. We still have Virgo and Capricorn and —"

"Capricorn? Of course! I bought one of those for—"

Mrs. Whistler stopped speaking. Her eyes rolled wildly as she grasped the counter for support. With a crash the tray of costume jewelry fell to the floor, and Mrs. Whistler collapsed on top of it. Before Miss Hefron could reach the stricken customer, Mrs. Whistler had miraculously recovered. Struggling to her feet, she replaced the tray awkwardly.

Mrs. Whistler's eyelids fluttered. "I've just been on my feet too long —a little dizzy spell. No more shopping today!"

Slowly Mrs. Whistler made her way toward the doors of the store, clutching her straw shopping bag firmly. For a dreadful moment she believed nothing was going to happen to her; then her spirits soared as a strong hand gripped her elbow. An ash-blonde woman with a flashing gold tooth was beside her.

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"Let's just step right up to the mezzanine office, honey."

Mrs. Whistler seemed bewildered. "Pardon? I can't look at anything else today."

The steely grip of the woman's talons tightened. "Step along, honey, d'ya hear? We'll straighten this out and everything will be hunky-dory."

Mrs. Whistler felt herself propelled toward a service elevator, whisked upstairs, and forcibly ushered into an austere office.

"Sit down, honey," said the woman. "I'm Miss Vought, Store Security. I didn't catch your name."

"No," said Mrs. Whistler. "You didn't."

Miss Vought flipped the switch of an intercom. "Miss Gifford, this is Vought. Tell Mr. Schlag I've landed a real pro."

Miss Vought rested her thin hips on the edge of the desk and inserted a cigarette between her raspberry lips. "Relax, honey. You'll sign a little statement and breeze out of here in no time."

"I don't understand."

Miss Vought laughed unpleasantly. "You're fabulous, honey. Just fabulous. That get-up you're wearing would fool anybody."

Dudley P. Schlag, drawn up to his full five feet one, strutted into the office, his pointed lapels bristling. Joyce Gifford, notebook in hand, followed. He did not see the astonished look that flashed across his secretary's face.

"We got the cool goods," Miss Vought told him. She rummaged in Mrs. Whistler's shopping bag and brought forth a Capricorn brooch set with tiny rhinestones. "Counter Eighteen. Pulled the old fainting act, glammed this. I had my eye on her for twenty minutes. She cased perfume first, then checked out novelties, finally wound up in jewelry."

"Kindly put down my brooch, young lady," said Mrs. Whistler, sweetly but firmly. "You might drop it."

"You're fabulous, honey," said Miss Vought, "fabulous."

"Name and address?" said Mr. Schlag.

"I live in New York. I'm Mrs. Whistler."

"Occupation?"

"I," said Mrs. Whistler, "am a Senior Citizen."

"All right, Grandma," said Schlag. "What about the brooch?"

"I bought it this morning. I don't remember the name of the store. I don't know your city very well."

"Where's the sales slip?"

"Of course!" Mrs. Whistler smiled brightly. "The name will be on the sales slip, and I'm careful about saving them." Then her face clouded. She seemed near tears. "But it was in my purse. And someone stole my purse just an hour or so ago."

"Tragic," said Schlag.

"I reported it to the police, of course."

Mr. Schlag spoke into the inter-

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com. "Mrs. Luden, call police headquarters and ask if a stolen purse was reported by a . . . *Mrs. Whistler.*" He smiled thinly.

"It won't wash, honey," said Miss Vought. "There were six Capricorn brooches when you staged your tumble at Counter Eighteen. But only five when you left."

"You double-checked?" asked Schlag.

"Sure. While she was ankling for the door."

Thoughtfully Schlag cracked his knuckles, then spun violently on Mrs. Whistler. "Those brooches were a plant, Grandma," he said. "That's why they were on the open counter."

"Gracious," said Mrs. Whistler. "You mean you were deliberately tempting people? Why, that's *wicked!*"

"My secretary will type out a little statement," he said, "saying you admit taking the brooch. You'll sign it, and then you can leave."

"Dear me," said Mrs. Whistler. "I almost believe you are accusing me of *stealing*. Why, I can't sign anything. It would be a lie." She stood up abruptly, snatching the brooch from Miss Vought. "Good afternoon," said Mrs. Whistler, taking a step toward the door.

Miss Vought and Schlag swooped like hawks, seizing her. "No, you don't, sister!" Miss Vought pried the brooch from Mrs. Whistler's fingers. "That's evidence!"

"You're under arrest!" shouted Schlag, then howled in pain as Mrs. Whistler's teeth sank into his hand.

Joyce Gifford sat in paralyzed shock, unable to move.

"The cooler for you, honey!" cried Miss Vought, restraining Mrs. Whistler with a hammerlock. "We've got the goods to fry you, and we'll see that they throw away the key!"

In less than an hour Mrs. Whistler had been booked, mugged, and fingerprinted.

At 2:15 P.M. a nervous, bedraggled Santa Claus elbowed through the crowded first floor aisles of MacTavish's. Like the Pied Piper, he acquired pursuing children at every step. "A bike!" "A beach ball!" "'Rector set!"

For a moment he leaned against Counter 18, warding off his tormentors. "Oh, Lord," he whispered hoarsely to Miss Hefron. "What a hell of a way to make a living!"

"Aren't you on the fourth floor?" she asked.

"Coffee break," Santa groaned. His closed hand rested near the tray of horoscope brooches. A customer called to Miss Hefron and she turned away. Only for a moment—but it was long enough.

At 4:25 P.M. Mr. Schlag glared across his desk at a resolute young man who returned his hostile look unflinchingly. "I, sir, am John R. Creighton, attorney-at-law." A busi-

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ness card was slammed onto the desk. "You, sir, are being sued for $500,000!"

"I beg your pardon?" The young attorney's piercing eyes were utterly unnerving. Mr. Schlag's mouth felt uncomfortably dry.

"My client," continued John Creighton, "a distinguished American actress, is suffering torment in the Los Angeles jail on trumped-up charges of shoplifting. You, sir, are responsible for this malicious accusation." The attorney's voice grew hollow. "May the Lord pity you, Mr. Schlag, for the courts never will!"

Schlag's confidence returned. He spoke quickly into the intercom. "Send Miss Vought up, please. And come in yourself, Miss Gifford—with your notebook." He turned back to the lawyer. "You're wasting your time, Mr. Creighton. This is clear-cut theft, and we'll prosecute to the fullest."

"Take notes, Miss Gifford," snapped Schlag.

"Yes, sir." Joyce glanced at Johnny without batting an eyelash.

Five minutes later Schlag was summing up the evidence. "The brooches were counted. Only five remained. Then your client, this Mrs. Whistler—" He smirked at the name. "—told a preposterous tale about a stolen purse with a sales slip from some imaginary store. We checked with the police and caught her flat-footed in her lie."

"I see," said Johnny slowly. "Who would have believed it?"

Joyce looked anxiously at Johnny. He looked humble and defeated as her eyes pleaded with him to do something.

At last he spoke. "Maybe we could check the brooches one more time?"

"Certainly." The four marched downstairs to Counter 18, Joyce tagging behind in despair. "Miss Hefron," said Schlag, "has the number of brooches on this tray changed since our incident with the *thief?*"

Johnny Creighton stared at the glittering jewelry. "The tray was knocked over," he said softly. "I wonder . . . Would you please pick up the tray? There's just a chance—"

Joyce lifted the tray from the counter. A Capricorn brooch, its clasp open, fell to the floor with a twinkle of light. "Under the tray!" exclaimed Johnny. "Who would have believed it!"

Miss Hefron was wide-eyed. "When they spilled! One got caught in the velvet underneath!"

Johnny's tone was ominous. "I count six brooches, Mr. Schlag. Shall we return to your office?"

On the mezzanine steps Schlag hesitated, then raced on toward the door marked Manager. A moment later he was shouting into the phone. "You've already gone to press? But I only gave you that shoplifter story a couple of hours ago! You can't kill it?"

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He hung up quickly as Johnny entered the office, followed by a smiling Joyce Gifford and a tense Miss Vought.

Taking the phone, Johnny dialed a number. "Police Headquarters? Missing Property, please . . . Yes, I'm calling about a black leather purse with identification for a Mrs. Whistler . . . Oh, it's been turned in? Fine!"

Johnny smiled at the store manager. "It was turned in an hour ago. By a child—a mere street urchin. A touching development, I think."

"Lemme talk to them!" Schlag snatched the phone. "That purse—is there a store sales slip in it?" During the moment's pause the receiver trembled against Schlag's ash-colored ear. "Yes? From Teague's? For $8.85?" His voice sank to a hopeless whisper. "Officer, at the bottom of that slip has a special tax been added . . . like for jewelry?"

Fifteen seconds later the phone was in its cradle and Dudley P. Schlag had collapsed in his swivel chair.

Johnny Creighton spoke softly but menacingly. "No doubt you'll soon learn that Mrs. Whistler reported the theft of her purse. Perhaps the officer didn't report to headquarters immediately. And I'm sure a clerk at Teague's will remember Mrs. Whistler's buying a brooch this morning. We are charging you with false arrest and imprisonment, slander, physical assault—"

"Assault? No one touched her!"

"You're lying!" Joyce Gifford slammed her notebook shut. "You both attacked her! I saw the whole brutal thing. You twisted her arm until she screamed and Mr. Schlag tried to kick her. It's a wonder the poor old lady isn't dead!" She stepped close to Johnny. "And I'll swear to that, Mr. . . . is it Leighton?"

At 6:10 four people sat in Schlag's office. Joyce Gifford was not present. She had left MacTavish's, never to return. Next to the store manager was Walter Matson, legal counsel for MacTavish's. Johnny Creighton was seated beside Mrs. Whistler whose hands were folded in her lap. A faraway look on her sweet face revealed signs of recent suffering.

Johnny was concluding his remarks. "On Monday we will sue for $500,000. Mrs. Whistler will be an appealing plaintiff, don't you think?"

"Five hundred thousand!" Attorney Matson's face was faintly purple. "You're out of your mind!"

"I agree." Mrs. Whistler put a gentle hand on Johnny's arm. "Let's end this unpleasantness without a lot of fuss. I'll drop this whole thing in exchange for two little favors. I've been through a shocking experience. And I hate to say it, but it's entirely your fault, Mr. Schlag.

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So I expect MacTavish's to pay me six thousand four hundred and eight dollars and eighty-five cents. Also, I met a charming woman today—in jail, of all places. Her name is Mrs. Blainey, and—"

"A shoplifter!" Schlag interrupted. "We've got a confession."

"You could drop the charges," said Mrs. Whistler. "I just couldn't be happy knowing she was in prison." Mrs. Whistler smiled brightly. "And when I'm unhappy, only one thing consoles me. Money—lots of it. $500,000 of it."

"Relax, Dudley," said the lawyer. "You've had it."

Joyce met them at the door of the apartment. She threw her arms first around Mrs. Whistler, then around Johnny. "You were just wonderful," she said. "Johnny, I never saw you like that before!"

Johnny coughed modestly. "Routine," he said, but he blushed a little.

They celebrated in a small candlelit restaurant. Johnny raised his glass. "Merry Christmas for the Blainey family! Sixty-four hundred will pay off the mortgage on their house."

Mrs. Whistler nodded. "And I'm getting back the $8.85 I spent for that dreadful brooch this morning." She frowned. "Oh, dear! I forgot about the rent for the Santa costume."

"What Santa costume?" Joyce asked. But Johnny quickly changed the subject.

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a *new* detective story by
JULIAN SYMONS

Could it be done? In front of 200 people, in front of Francis Quarles himself? Could a string of valuable pearls simply disappear, vanish before their eyes? . . . a classical problem in mystery and detection that never fails to intrigue and entrance.

THE IMPOSSIBLE THEFT

by JULIAN SYMONS

IT WAS AN IMPOSSIBLE THEFT, AS private detective Francis Quarles said when he told the story afterward in the club; and like all impossible crimes it was really simple. The way the crime was committed, and the identity of the criminal, were obvious once you knew his occupation.

"And of course you guessed it," one of his listeners said sarcastically.

"Not guessed, deduced. That's the point of the story."

It began when Ossie Gregory—who was always called Ossie for some reason, although he wasn't an Australian and his name was not Oswald but Dick—came to see him. Gregory also was a private detective, of a humble kind. After a couple of drinks he would tell you that he had been a professional boxer and a bodyguard, had worked in a casino and a circus, and had even been a cowboy on the biggest ranch in Texas.

Just now Ossie Gregory was worried.

"It's Solly Raven's daughter, she's getting engaged. You know Solly Raven?" Quarles nodded. Raven was the flashiest bookmaker in London. "Solly likes to put on a show, you know that, so he's bought her this rope of pearls as an engagement present—cost him I don't know how many thousand quid. Nothing'll do for him but the pearls must be on show at her engagement party for everyone to see. So he'll take 'em out of the case, put 'em round her neck, and everyone yells hurrah for Solly, right? He's hired me to be there—to keep an eye on 'em and on everything in general. Get it?"

"It sounds straightforward enough," said Quarles.

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"Should be, but then yesterday he got this."

"This" was a sheet of paper on which words cut from newspapers had been pasted. They read:

TEN O'CLOCK YOU'VE GOT YOUR PEARLS TEN FIFTEEN YOU HAVEN'T

Quarles raised his eyebrows. "Nice of him to tell us in advance when he's going to take them."

"It's just about when Solly's going to put them round his daughter's neck. I don't like it, Mr. Quarles. A straightforward job, taking care of toughs, that's okay. But something like this needs more in the upper story than I've got."

Gregory then added wistfully, "I don't suppose you would come along? Two heads are better than one, especially when one of them is yours."

That was why Quarles attended Roberta Raven's engagement dance at London's newest hotel, the Lanchester.

There were at least two hundred guests, many of them looking uneasy in their dinner jackets. The pearls were in a showcase at one end of the room and Solly Raven, with the biggest cigar Quarles had ever seen stuck in his red face, led guests up to them with pride.

Ossie Gregory stayed near the showcase, his face set in a look of dogged suspicion. Quarles ate canapes, turkey, and iced strawberries, and reflected that although some of the guests might pick pockets, they did not look up to stealing pearls.

Solly Raven came up to him. "Enjoying yourself, Mr. Quarles? Got all you want to eat? Seen what I'm giving to my little girl? And she deserves it, let me tell you." He put a large arm round the shoulders of his pert, pretty daughter. "Nothing's too good for my Roberta."

"Does that mean you think I'm not good enough?" That was Roberta's young man, James Barry, dark and self-assured. He was wearing a conspicuous emerald-green double-breasted dinner jacket. Raven merely grunted, evidently not delighted by the prospect of having James Barry for a son-in-law. But now he turned to greet a small gray-haired man who had just arrived.

"Professor Burtenshaw, this is a real honor. You know my daughter—and Mr. Quarles."

"We're old friends," Quarles said. Burtenshaw was one of the greatest British experts on precious stones—in particular, on diamonds and pearls.

"Hey, Gregory," Raven called out. The dectective nodded, obviously knowing what he had to do. He unlocked the showcase, carefully took out the rope of pearls, and handed it to Solly, who passed it on to the Professor.

Quarles looked at his watch. The time was exactly 10:01.

"Beautiful," Burtenshaw said.

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"Perfectly matched. And such luster. Quite beautiful, I must say."

"I'm not going to tell you how much they set me back." Raven looked as though he would have been very willing to tell if he were pressed.

The pearls went from hand to hand in the circle of a dozen people surrounding the bookmaker. James Barry murmured something about them matching their wearer, and passed them on. Ossie watched their progress with unconcealed anxiety, sweat on his forehead, until they came back to him. Then he returned them to the showcase, locked the case, and sighed with relief.

"Oh, no, you don't," Barry cried out suddenly. He turned on a small foxy-looking waiter just behind him. "You had your hand on my wallet! Come on, turn out your pockets, and show us what else you've got."

The waiter protested innocence, and shook off Barry's hand. Everybody was looking at them.

"Please, darling," Roberta said. "You've still got your wallet, after all. Don't spoil the evening."

Reluctantly Barry subsided. Harmony was restored. Solly Raven clapped his hands. "And now, ladies and gentlemen, your attention for a moment, please. Gregory."

Ossie unlocked the showcase again, and then paused before touching the pearls. He looked frightened. The veins on his neck stood out like cords.

He said in a strangled voice, "Mr. Raven, Professor, Mr. Quarles. These pearls don't look right."

Professor Burtenshaw took out the rope in the showcase, examined it, and said, "These are not the same pearls. They're the crudest sort of paste."

Raven howled with anger. Roberta began to cry. Quarles looked at his watch again.

The time was exactly 10:15.

At this point Quarles stopped, and beamed at his club audience. Somebody urged, "Go on."

"That's all. The problem is: Who stole the pearls and how was it done?"

"The police searched everybody?"

"Everybody. And everyone who had touched the pearls when they were passed round was searched and stripped, even Raven and Gregory. They searched the room, too. No good."

"That expert, what's his name, Burtenshaw," said an accountant named Sanders, who claimed to solve every detective story he read. "He was a fake."

"No. I told you I knew Burtenshaw. Everything he said was absolutely true."

Sanders was thinking hard. "That row Barry had with the waiter must have had something to do with it. The waiter was an ac-

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complice. Barry stole the pearls and slipped them to the waiter."

"Barry had nothing to do with it. But you're right about the waiter being an accomplice. His job was to create a diversion so that the thief could hide the pearls."

"Solly Raven stole them, for the insurance?"

"No."

Sanders' brow wrinkled. "You're not going to tell us it was Gregory?"

"Yes. It was he who wrote the warning letter, who arranged the whole thing."

"But he called you in himself."

"He wanted a respectable witness, and thought he could fool me. That was his only mistake," Quarles said modestly.

"You told us he'd been searched, and there was nothing on him."

"He was searched, and there was nothing on him."

"He hid them somewhere in the room? Under the showcase, with chewing gum?"

"He didn't hide the pearls in the room."

"But that's impossible! Where were they?"

"When the real pearls were handed back to Gregory, he palmed them and put the paste ones in the showcase. Then he got rid of the real ones."

"But how?" Sanders cried. "How?"

"What was Gregory's occupation? I told you that was the point of the story."

"Why, you told us he was a private detective."

"And what was he before that? I told you he'd worked in a circus, and I told you he was called Ossie. I put two and two together, and realized what Ossie might stand for."

There was silence. "Come on then," Sanders said. "What did it stand for?"

"The name of his circus act. He was a swallower. He used to swallow live frogs and rats, and bring them back alive. A string of pearls was nothing to him. They called him the Human Ostrich."

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As you may remember (Karmesin's first appearances in print in the United States were in EQMM), Karmesin is "either the greatest criminal or the greatest liar the world has ever known." In this truthful tale (or mendacious memoir, as you decide to look at it) Karmesin tells how he participated (perhaps that is too mild a word) in a grand bibliophilic swindle that linked Shakespeare and Sir Francis Bacon (the never-fading controversy) with the Society for the Clarification of History . . . a clever and captivating chronicle of literary criminality . . .

KARMESIN AND THE HAMLET PROMPTBOOK

by GERALD KERSH

ON A BLAST OF BITTER EAST WIND that rushed down Great Russell Street came a spatter of cold raindrops that bit like small shot. I reached the portico of the British Museum one jump ahead of the storm, and there, standing apart from the students who had come out of the reading room for air and sandwiches, illuminated by a lightning flash, stood Karmesin in a black rubber Inverness cape reaching to his ankles and an oilskin hat shaped like a gloxinia.

One hand grasped a Kaffir knobkerrie with a gold-plated head, while the other applied motions as of artificial respiration to his half-drowned mustache, and he was glaring at a Polynesian monolith in such a manner that I half expected its great stone eyes to look uneasily away.

"Third storm this morning," I said.

He looked at me, glowering like the Spirit of the Tempest.

"A wretched day would not be complete without you. I would invite you to offer me coffee, if I did not object to sitting at table with imbeciles," he muttered. "Do you realize I could sue you, your publishers and printers, your distributors, news agents and booksellers for millions? And I would, too, if I needed petty cash. How dare you describe me as 'either the greatest criminal or the greatest liar the world has ever known'? This is libelous: a liar always betrays a desire to be believed. Damn your impudence, have I ever cared whether you believed me or not?"

"No," I said, "but—"

"No," he interrupted. "And you

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assume that a truly great criminal never talks of his work, but how wrong you are! A confession unsupported by evidence is only a story, you suppose—and I leave no evidence. I run no risk in telling you certain incidents, you scribbler, to enable you to put a few greasy pennies in your moth-eaten pockets. Remember this: the most pitiful sucker on earth is your skeptic. If you insist, we will go to the Cheese Restaurant and have a bit of Brie and a glass of wine, if you can pay."

The rain abating, we went; but Karmesin was not easily to be placated this morning. He continued, "It's not so much your catchphrases that annoy me as your writing. I read your version of how, having disguised myself as a statue in Westminster Abbey, I discovered a sonnet of Shakespeare in Spenser's tomb, and I blushed for you."

"All I did was—" I began, but Karmesin interjected, "You be quiet!" At least the cheese appeared to please him. "I like Brie and wine," he said.

"They are the two things in this world that are impossible to fake. Not even Melmoth Agnew could successfully counterfeit their flavor."

"Strange name," I said.

"Strange man," said Karmesin. "If only you could write, what a story you might tell about him and me—for without me, he is nothing—and about the Society for the Clarification of History." He shook his great head. "But I can just see you describing Melmoth Agnew, for instance, as 'an anaglyphic character'—here you put three dots—'a personality in low relief'—then more dots—'in other words, he had practically no individuality of his own.' "

I said, "Have more cheese. For goodness' sake, have some more wine. Have a cigarette."

He accepted gruffly and continued, "I had occasion just now to upbraid a certain inky little penny-a-liner not a hundred miles from here in connection with a sonnet of Shakespeare. Then, the name of Melmoth Agnew comes up in connection with cheese, and in spite of myself I find myself telling you that I once employed the fellow in a matter concerning quite a different kind of Shakespearean document."

I said, "What sort of document?"

"Ah, you are saying to yourself, 'Old Karmesin is going to tell me now that he discovered a lost play by that greatest of poets.' As usual, you are entirely wrong," he said, then told this story:

I employed Agnew when I felt morally bound to do a service for a distressed gentleman. Do you know what a gentleman is? A gentleman is one who, among other things, does not twist his friends' conversation into excruciating prose forms and hawk them from editor to editor (said Karmesin, giving me a hard look).

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The gentleman we will call Sir Massey Joyce, of King's Massey, in Kent. I had not seen him for a long time; nobody had. They said he had turned recluse and buried himself in the country. Having been abroad for some years I had lost touch with him.

Then, one day, certain business taking me to Ashford, it occurred to me to drive over and say "How d'you do."

You have seen photographs of King's Massey in *Stately Homes of England*. It is a beautiful old house, in three different styles of architecture—early Tudor, part of it "modernized" by Inigo Jones in the 1620's, with a wing by Adam built in the Eighteenth Century—the incongruities oddly harmonious.

Massey Joyce was confused, almost embarrassed. He said, "My dear fellow, come in! Come in!"

For a recluse, I thought, he was remarkably pleased to have company. "It's nearly dinnertime," Massey said. "Let's have a glass of sherry," and the old butler, Hubbard, served us, while my host chattered of things past in London.

He is lonely, I said to myself as we went in to dinner. The great mahogany table was set sumptuously with the Joyce plate. The huge silver-gilt centerpiece was heaped with fresh fruit. Old Hubbard poured us a rare old Chablis and served a fish course—three tinned sardines.

After this the entree came up: vegetables and, on a gleaming silver platter, canned corned beef, thinly sliced. With this—well, did you ever try bully beef with a vintage *Clos-Vougeot?* It's rather curious.

And then there was a little block of pasteurized synthetic cheese with a bottle of rare old port, and some coffee-type essence in cups of Sevres porcelain accompanied by a hundred-year-old brandy and superlative cigars.

After dinner, sitting over more brandy in the library, Massey Joyce said to me, "There's enough wine and cigars in the cellar and the cabinets to last out my time: I don't entertain much nowadays. But for the rest, one rubs along, what?"

I said, "It might appear, old friend, that things aren't all they should be."

He answered, "Confidentially, I'm stone broke. I say nothing of taxes. Certain domestic affairs, which we'll not discuss, set me back more than I had—over a quarter of a million. Everything you see, except the wine, the tobacco and these books, is entailed or mortgaged."

I said, "I know, Massey. Norway sardines and Argentine beef might be a quirk of taste; but never penny paraffin candles in silver-gilt sconces."

"Well, I can't bilk the fishmonger and the butcher," said he. "The books must go next."

I was shocked at this. Sir Massey Joyce's library was his haven, his last refuge. It was not that he was

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a bibliophile: He loved his library —the very presence of all those ranged volumes with their fine scent of old leather comforted him and soothed his soul.

He went on, "Anyway, this is a deuced expensive room to heat. I'll save insurance too. I'll read in the little study, where it's snug. Oh, I know what's in your mind, old boy. How much do I need, and all that, eh? Well, to see my way out with a clear conscience, I want ten thousand pounds. Borrowing is out of the question—I could never pay back."

I said, "Between old friends, Massey, is there nothing I can do for you?"

"Stay with me a day or two. There's a man coming about the library. I thought I might get more, selling by private treaty. He isn't a dealer; he's an agent for the Society for the Clarification of History. You know, ever since Boswell's diary was found in an old trunk, there's hardly an attic or a private collection in England they haven't pawed over. I'm told they have all the money in the world, and anything they want they'll pay a fancy price for. What the devil *is* this Society for the Clarification of History, anyway?"

I said, "You know how it is—a few people like to make something, but most people prefer to break something. You may earn a crust for praising great men, but you will get rich belittling them. The Society for the Clarification of History is fundamentally a debunking society; it's just the kind of thing fidgety millionaires' widows like to play with.

"It's back-fence gossip on a cosmic scale. There's excitement in it and controversy in it and publicity; and it's less bourgeois than endowing orphanages—and not half as expensive. They like to prove all kinds of things—they are heritage busters and tradition wreckers: Paul Revere couldn't ride; Daniel Boone was a Bohun and, therefore, rightful king of England; the author of Othello, in certain lines addressed by the Moor to Iago, prophesied the great Fire of Chicago. Touching which, their great ambition is to prove beyond doubt that Francis Bacon wrote the works of William Shakespeare. They'd give their eyeteeth for incontrovertible evidence of that."

"All poppycock!" Massey Joyce shouted. "Bacon did nothing of the sort."

"I know he didn't. But why do you want me to stay?"

"I beg pardon, old fellow. That Baconian nonsense always irritates me. Apart from the joy it is to have you here, I want you with me because one of these Clarification of History people called Dr. Olaf Brod is coming Wednesday morning. You're shrewd. I'm not. Handle the business for me?"

I said I would and that he was not to worry; but my heart misgave

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me. True, Massey Joyce had 25,000 volumes, many of them rare, especially in the category of the drama. But books, when you want to buy them, are costly, and when you need to sell them, valueless. However much had been spent on the library, Massey Joyce would be very lucky to get a couple of thousand pounds for the lot.

I did not sleep well that night; the owls kept hooting *O Iago!* . . . *Iago* . . . *Iago* . . .

I was concerned for my old friend; in times like these, we must preserve such honorable anachronisms as Sir Massey Joyce. He was one of the last of a fine old breed: a benevolent landlord, proud but sweet-natured, and a great sportsman.

He was the Horseman of the Shires, who had finished the course in the Grand National; at the Amateurs' Club he had fought eight rounds with Bob Fitzsimmons; as a cricketer he was one of the finest batsmen in the country; and he was a stubborn defender of individual liberty, a protector of the poor, and third-best-dressed man in England. A Complete Man.

And, furthermore, a patron of the arts, especially of the theater—his first wife was Delia Yorke, a fine comic actress and a very beautiful woman in her day.

This marriage was perfectly happy. Delia was the good angel of the countryside. But they had a wretch of a son, and he went to the dogs—he drank, swindled, forged, embezzled and, to hush matters up, Massey Joyce paid. Having run down to the bottom of the gamut of larceny, the young scoundrel became a gossip columnist and then went out in a blaze of scandal, when a woman he was trying to blackmail shot him. This broke Delia's heart, and she died a year later.

But my dear friend Massey Joyce had to live on, and so he did, putting a brave front on it. Then he married again, because he met a girl who reminded him of his truly beloved Delia. She was much younger than Massey, also an actress, and her only resemblance to Delia was in her manner of speaking: she had studied it, of course. This was the best job of acting that shallow little performer ever did.

Massey financed three plays for her. They were complete failures. She blamed Massey naturally, left him, and ran off with a Romanian film director.

Massey let her divorce him, saying, "That Romanian won't last. Poor Alicia can't act, and she ain't the kind of beauty that mellows with age. She'll need to eat. It's my fault anyway. What business has an old man marrying a young woman? Serves me right."

Outwardly he looked the same, but he seemed to have lost interest. He sold his stable, rented his shooting, stopped coming up to town for the first nights, sold his house in Manchester Square, resigned from

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his clubs, locked up most of King's Massey, and lived as I have described. I had not known he was so poor.

Before dawn, giving up all hope of sleep, I carried my candle down to the library: the electricity had been cut off, of course.

A glance at the catalogue more than confirmed my misgivings. Readers of these kinds of books are becoming fewer and fewer; there was not a dealer in the country who would trouble to give Massey Joyce's treasures shelf space.

Hoping against hope, I opened a cabinet marked MSS: ELIZABETHAN. The drawers were full of trivial stuff, mostly contemporary fair copies, so-called, of plays and masques, written by clerks for the use of such leading actors as knew how to read.

My heart grew heavier and heavier. All this stuff was next door to worthless. The sun rose. Chicago, Chicago, Chicago! said a sparrow. And then I had an idea.

I took out of the cabinet a tattered old promptbook of the tragedy of *Hamlet,* copied about 1614 and full of queer abbreviations and misspellings, and carried it up to my room. Although I knew the play by heart, I reread it with minute attention, then put the manuscript in my suitcase, and went down to breakfast.

Over this meal I said to Massey Joyce, "It's understood, now. I have a free hand to deal with this Dr. Olaf Brod and his Society for the Clarification of History?"

"Perfectly," he said. "I'm grateful. He might come out with some of that damned Baconian stuff, and I'd lose my temper."

"Just keep quiet," I said.

And it was as well that Massey Joyce did as I advised, for Olaf Brod was one of those melancholy Danes who rejoice only in being contradictory. His manner was curt and bristly, like his hair.

He bustled in about lunchtime and said, in a peremptory voice, "I haf time now only for a cursory glance. I must go unexpectedly to Wales. Proof positif has been discovert at last of the nonexistence of King Artur. Today is the second of July. I return on der tventiet."

He rushed about the library. "I had been toldt of manuscripts," he said.

I replied, "Doctor, we had better leave those until you can study them."

"Yes," he said, "it is better soh." But he stopped for a quick luncheon. Massey had up some golden glory in the form of an old champagne. Doctor Brod was severe. "I am a vechetarian," he said.

Massey asked, "Isn't wine a vegetable drink, sir?"

With his mouth full of carrots, Brod replied, "Not soh! Dat bottle is a grafeyard. Effery sip you take contains de putrefiedt corpses of a trillion bacteria of pfermentation."

"Hubbard, fresh water to Doctor

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Brod," said Massey, but Brod said, "Der water here is full of chalk; it is poisonous. It makes stones in der kidleys."

Massey said, "Been drinking it sixty-five years, and I have no stones in my kidneys, sir."

Olaf Brod answered, "Vait and see. Also, der cigar you schmoke is a crematorium of stinking cherms and viruses." Luckily he was in a hurry to leave. But he paused on the threshold to say, "On de tventiet I come again. No more cigars, no more vine, eh? Soh! Boil der vater to precipitade de calcium. Farevell!"

I said to Massey Joyce, having calmed him down, "I'll be here on the nineteenth, old fellow."

He said, "There'll be murder done if you ain't!"

Then I hurried back to town, taking that old promptbook copy of *Hamlet* with me. I also took a little lead from one of the old gutters in the Tudor part of King's Massey.

What for? To make a pencil with, of course; and this was a matter of an hour. I simply rubbed the sliver of metal to as fine a point as it would conveniently take: it wrote dull gray. This done, I went to see Melmoth Agnew.

You would have loved to describe him; you would have pulled out all the stops (said Karmesin, and in a horrible mockery of my voice and style, he proceeded to improvise). Melmoth had pale, smooth cheeks. His large round eyes, shiny, protuberant, and vague, were like bubbles full of smoke. The merest hint of a cinnamon-brown mustache emphasized the indecision of his upper lip.

He carried his cigarette in a surreptitious way, hidden in a cupped hand. He had something of the air of a boy who has recently been at the doughnuts and is making matters worse by smoking. I half expected his black-silk suit to give out a faint metallic crackle, like burnt paper cooling.

His silk Shantung shirt was of the tints of dust and twilight, and his dull red tie had an ashen bloom on it like that of a dying ember . . . That's your kind of writing, give or take a few "ineluctables" and "indescribables" and whatnot. Bah!

Agnew was a kind of sensitized Nobody. You have heard of that blind and witless pianist whom P. T. Barnum exhibited? The one who had only to hear a piece of music played once, and he could play it again, exactly reproducing the touch and the manner of the person who had played before him, whether that person was a music teacher in a kindergarten or a Franz Liszt? Great executants deliberately made tiny mistakes in playing the most complicated fugues; Blind Tom, or whatever they called him, reproduced these errors too.

Agnew was like that, only his talent was with the pen. He had only to look at a holograph, to re-

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produce it in such a manner that no two handwriting experts could ever agree as to its complete authenticity.

I had previously found several uses for Melmoth Agnew; this time I carried him off to the British Museum, where I made him study some manuscripts of Francis Bacon. This peculiar fellow simply had, in a manner of speaking, to click open the shutters of his eyes and expose himself for a few minutes to what he was told to memorize.

I warned him to take especial care, but he assured me in the most vapid drawl that ever man carried away from Oxford, "The holograph of Lord Verulam, Viscount St. Albans, is indelibly imprinted on my memory, sir. I am ready to transcribe in his calligraphy any document you place before me. Problems of ink, and so on, I leave to you."

"It is to be written with a lead point."

"Then it is child's play," said he, wanly smiling, "but it would be so much nicer in ink."

I knew all about that. There are other experts who, with chemicals and spectroscopes and microscopes, could make child's play of detecting new from old, especially in mixtures like ink and the abrasions made by pens.

Against a coming emergency, which I was anticipating, I had in preparation an ink of copperas, or ferrous sulfate, which I made with unrefined sulfuric acid and iron pyrites; gum arabic out of the binding of a half-gutted Spanish edition of Lactantius dated 1611; and the excrescenses raised by the cynips insect on the *Quercus infestoria*, better known as nutgalls—the whole adulterated with real Elizabethan soot out of one of the blocked-up chimneys of King's Massey. But it would take a year to age this blend, and there was no time to spare. This was none of Agnew's business.

I showed him the promptbook copy of *Hamlet* and said, "Observe that the last half page is blank. Take that lead stylus and, precisely in Francis Bacon's hand, copy me this." I gave him a sheet of paper.

Having perused what I had written there, he said, "I beg pardon, but am I supposed to make sense of this?"

I told him, "No. You are to make a hundred pounds out of it."

So Agnew nodded in slow motion and went to work, silent, incurious, perfect as a fine machine, and the calligraphy of Francis Bacon lived again. He was finished in an hour.

"I'm afraid it's rather pale," he said apologetically.

I said, "I know. Forget it."

And such was his nature that I believe he forgot the matter forthwith; he even had to make an effort to remember his hundred pounds—I had to remind him.

Now I will write out for you, in modern English, what I had given

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Agnew to copy. In this version I will make certain modifications in spelling so that the riddle I propounded conforms with the key to it. Here:

I seek in vain the Middle Sea to see,
Without it I am not, yet here I be
Lost, in a desperate Soliloquy.
If you would learn this humble name of mine
Take 3 and 16 and a score-and-9.
Count 30, 31, and 46,
Be sure your ciphers in their order mix,
Thus, after 46 comes 47
As surely as a sinner hopes for Heaven.
Take 56, and 64 and 5,
And so you will by diligence arrive
At numbers 69 and 72.
Five figures running now must wait on you
As 86, 7, 8, 9, ten fall due,
'Tis nearly done. Now do not hesitate
To mark 100; 56, 7, 8,
My mask is dropt, my little game is o'er
And having read my name, you read no more.

Of course, this should not tax the intelligence of the average coal heaver, in possession of all the clues I have given. Yet, for you, I had better explain!

What desperate Soliloquy in *Hamlet* contains the words, "No more"? The familiar one, of course: "To be, or not to be," and so on.

Examine that somber opening to Hamlet's Soliloquy; and you will notice that, curiously enough, the letter *C* does not occur any where in the first six lines. The writer is not a homesick Spaniard or Italian far from the Mediterranean, which formerly was called the "Middle Sea." He refers to the missing *C* in his name. He has buried his identity in the first half dozen lines of Hamlet's familiar Soliloquy.

Having guessed this far—why, babes in kindergarten solve trickier puzzles than this riddle of the rhyming numbers. Starting with "To be," count the letters by their numbers, as far as "No more." Letters *3, 16, 29, 30, 31, 46, 47, 56, 64, 65, 69, 72, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 156, 157* and *158*. So it reads:

To Be, *or not to be—th*At *is the questi*ON:
W*hether 'tis noble*R I*n the mind*
To *suffer*
THe *sl*Ing*s and arrows of ou*TRAGE*ous fortune*
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them.
To DIE—*to sleep*
No more . . . .

Hence, "Ba-on writ this tragedie." Without his middle *C*, Bacon is not; yet here he is. And so he tells you—and in his own handwriting too!

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A real lawyer's split-hair quibble, what? Just tortuous enough. A meaty bone for the debunkers, eh? It might be asked, "Why should Bacon have written this?" The answer is: "Bacon liked actors; he wrote it in a promptbook to amuse some sprightly player after a theatrical supper, circa 1615."

So, having suitably oxidized the faint lead in the pencil marks, half erasing them in a process of ever so gently abrasion, I returned to King's Massey on the nineteenth and slipped the promptbook back where I had found it.

Massey Joyce said, "I do hope this Brod man coughs up. Do you know, Hubbard and his wife—who cooks and housekeeps—haven't had any wages for three years? I tried to pay 'em off when I sold my guns and sporting prints, but they wouldn't go. Begged pardon; said they'd known the good times, and by the Lord Harry they'd stand by in the bad."

"Do those Elizabethan manuscripts of yours mean much to you?" I asked.

He said, "No. Why?"

I told him, "Why then, Massey, we'll save your old books yet. Only you keep out of it. Have a migraine; keep to your room and leave it to me."

So he did; and Doctor Brod turned up on the morning of the twentieth with a friend, one Doctor Brewster, also of the Society for the Clarification of History, but lean and keen, with a businesslike dry-cleaned look about him. As I had expected, they found little enough to interest them on the bookshelves.

By the time they got to the manuscripts Brod was already fidgeting and looking at his watch. Casually forcing my marked promptbook on them, somewhat as a conjurer does when he makes you pick a card, I said, "I doubt if there's much here. But Sir Massey regards these holographs as the apple of his eye. The one you have there is rather defaced, I'm afraid. A lot of the others are in much better condition."

But Brod, suddenly perspiring like a pressed duckling, had a reading glass out, and Brewster was putting on a pair of microscope spectacles, and they were scrutinizing my little poem in the strong sunlight by the window.

Brod took out notebook and pencil and made voluminous notes, occasionally nudging Brewster, who remained blank and impassive. *They* knew Bacon's hand, bless their hearts! And cryptograms were meat and drink to the likes of them.

After a while, with complete composure, Brewster said, "I don't know. It's possible the Society might be interested in two or three of these manuscripts."

But I said, "I'm awfully sorry; two or three won't do, I'm afraid. Sir Massey regards this collection

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as a whole. He'd never break it up. There are interesting fragments by Nathaniel Field, for example, and Middleton, and Fletcher. I'm no expert, Doctor, only a friendly agent."

"Sir Massey Joyce would not refuse permission to photograph or copy certain excerpts," said Brod.

I answered, "I'm afraid he would."

Then Brewster asked, "Has this collection ever been offered for sale before?"

I told him, "Never. It has never even been properly catalogued, I'm afraid."

Brewster tossed the *Hamlet* nonchalantly, as if it were a mail-order catalogue, onto a baize-covered table—I wouldn't advise a novice to play poker with that one—and he asked, "How much is Massey Joyce asking for the collection?"

Apologizing, as for an embarrassing but harmless eccentric, I said, "Well, you see, Sir Massey values things strictly in proportion to how much he personally likes them. So he swears he won't sell the manuscripts for a penny less than twenty-five thousand pounds."

I laughed here, and so did Doctor Brewster, while Brod muttered something about "vine drunkards" and "devourers of the charred carcasses of slaughtered beasts."

I put the *Hamlet* back in its drawer and continued, "I know it's absurd; but when a man of Sir Massey's age has an *idée fixe*—you know? I'm afraid I've wasted your time. Well, I suppose you can't find something in your line every time you look. Oh, by the way, do you happen to know a collector named Lilienbach? He's coming next Monday. I wondered if he was all right."

I knew, of course, that Doctor Lilienbach of Philadelphia was one of the richest collectors of rare books and manuscripts in the world; and, of course, these fellows were sure to know this too.

"Lilienbach," Brod began, but Brewster cut in, "Lilienbach, Lilienbach? No, I can't say I know him. Let's not be hasty. These things take time. Look here; say I pay Sir Massey Joyce a small sum down for an option to purchase on terms to be mutually agreed?"

I said, "I shouldn't, if I were you —not until Sir Massey has had a chance to talk to Doctor Lilienbach."

Then there was a silence until, at last, Brewster said, "I'll have to call Chicago. Even *if* I were interested, I couldn't make any sort of bid before tonight."

I said, "Why not do that? Only I'm afraid you'll have to call from Ashford, Sir Massey does not believe in telephones. He thinks they cause rheumatism."

And to cut a long story short: after a day of negotiation the Society for the Clarification of History authorized Brewster to purchase Sir Massey Joyce's Elizabeth-

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an manuscripts, with all rights pertaining thereto, for £17,500.

So my old friend kept his books and had some money to support himself and the Hubbards in their declining years.

Karmesin paused. I asked, "And you got nothing?"

Karmesin said, "Massey Joyce wanted me to take half. I couldn't possibly, of course. Am I a petty larcenist to work for chicken feed? No. My amusements are few; I had my fun. For a small outlay, I had the double-barreled pleasure of helping a friend in need at the expense of an organization which I despise."

There being a wedge of cheese left, Karmesin wrapped it in a paper napkin and put it in his pocket.

I said, "I've read nothing of your 'Baconian' document as yet."

"You will. They are preparing a book about it, and my ink is brewing for a counterblast that will shake the world. You just wait and see!"

"So there the matter ended?"

Karmesin grunted, "After dinner that night Massey Joyce said to me, 'It is astounding that such societies can exist. They really believe Bacon wrote Shakespeare! No, really, there *are* limits! Was ever a more pernicious fable hatched by cranks?'"

"'Never,' I said.

"'It is wonderful what people can be gulled into believing—Bacon, indeed! Why, every shopgirl knows that the plays of William Shakespeare, so-called, were written by Christopher Marlowe!' said Massey Joyce."

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Unc and Woody are back again—breezier, wheezier, and bees-kneezier than ever! Unc, the Sherlock from Weevers, Ind., and Woody, the Watson from the Insidious East Coast—what a delightful detective duo they are! And in this "Variety-'vestigation" we have a strange mystery indeed: Who threw green paint over Wanda Jean Finch's $500 marimba, ruining that seven-year-old's vaude single of "I'm Putting All My Eggs in One Basket," and what made this dastardly act of vandalism an "impossible crime"? Happy deciphering!

UNC FOILS SHOW FOE

by JOHN JAKES

IN-FLIGHT FLIX CAME TO SHARP halt as pilot announced midst midnight bouncings that a navigation gizmo had defuncted, resulting in letdown of big jet at airport I discovered was Cincy., O.

Plane was theoretically Gotham nonstopper, carrying me back from latest road stand for *GALORE, The Newspaper of Amusement.* But as it was already Sat. and I was not due in shop until Mon. ayem, seemed ideal setup for quick wheel-over to Weevers, Ind., home grounds for my only relatives, who raised me after my folks passed on.

Same burg is located in hills north of O. River. Yearly vacations and side trips are pleasant changes of pace after nights spent lamping stars in saloons.

A toothsome airport chick skedded me on flight out of Indpls. late Sun. eve. Then I ascertained rental car was available. Before claiming, I went into the lounge for a quick cleanup, only to discover my shave bomb in emptysville. I would have to surprise Weevers kin sans smootho cheeks.

Midmorning Sat. discovered me tooling down Main Street, Weevers, in warm June sun. Quick pause and park revealed odd circumstance. My Uncle Pinkerton was not present in his hardware store. Also noted hand-scrawled placard in window flacking *Annual Rummage Sale!* being staged Fri. and all day today by Ladies' Aid of Presbyterian Church. Doubtless Aunt Ellen would be attending event.

I hopped back in car while groups of farm folks shopping ogled continental cut of my threads and cast glances askance. Weevers has lofty suspicions of Insidious East Coast.

Wondering about Unc's where-

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abouts, I headed for Elm Street, location of big, old white house belonging to Unc and Aunt E. On left I saw a large, gabled joint with neon sign frontmost. Recalled this was Unc's lodge hall. In the side parking lot spotted a County Sheriff's cruiser and Unc's old, straight-stick Chev coupe.

This promised mystery. Unc is considered a double-dome in Weevers—viz., he knows what blvd. *Lullaby of Broadway* is named after. Rural constabulary invariably consult him on matters criminologic.

I pulled in and ascended the lodge hall steps. A card inside a glass bulletin case read: *Saturday Night Only—STAR-STUDDED VARIETY SHOW! Tickets $1.50. Benefit Fluoridation Referendum Publicity Committee.*

Puzzling over unique teaming of music and molars, I was unprepared for sudden opening of door. Got glowers from middle-aged Deputy Sheriff standing guard.

"Sheriff Gumley says no newspaper reporters allowed until the trouble's cleared up, buddy."

"The name's not buddy, and I'm not exactly a newspaper reporter."

Beaucoup ogling of my strictly uptown wardrobe. "Well, I know for a fact the manager don't talk to liquor peddlers on week-ends. Beat it, bub."

Luckily I espied Unc passing across corridor within.

"Unc! Hey, Unc, it's me!"

In act of putting bandanna back into wash-pants pocket, Unc peered. "Good land! Woodrow! What on earth are you doing here? Otis, let him in. That's my nephew, Woodrow Ennis. You remember, my sister Nella's boy."

Deputy did goggle. "You're joshing me, Pinkerton. I recollect Woodrow Ennis when he was just a shaver shooting marbles in front of the courthouse. This fella looks like a Chicago sharpie."

"Tempus fugits, Clyde," I said, but Deputy didn't flip over in-type levity.

"My, Woodrow," said Unc as I bypassed guard, "I surely am glad to see you. I know your Aunt will be, too. She's over at the church rummage sale this morning, by the way."

Following Unc down long stuffy hall, I heard from chamber on left ahead a soprano caterwaul, as of young chick doing bathos bit. Unc was thinking of something else.

"By the way, Woodrow, the snapshot you sent in your last letter from San Francisco sort of upset your Aunt. Now I appreciate you have to visit night clubs for your entertainment newspaper, but your Aunt was mighty worried by the picture of those girls wearing not much more than their good intentions. Also, they appeared to be gyrating some."

"Gosh, Unc," I said, "I thought Aunt E. would dig a scene of au-

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thentic SF discotheque dansapation."

"Unfortunately, Woodrow, your Aunt doesn't fathom the customs of the entertainment trades. Which is why you have to sort of shift mental gears when you visit Weevers." But he grinned and punched my shoulder. Pleasantry was short-lived, however. Caterwauling burst out afresh from room ahead.

"Say, Unc, what's that racket? And why the fuzzmobile parked outside?"

"Someone," said Unc with grim glance, "did a mean underhanded thing last night. Sneaked in here—well, I shouldn't say sneaked, exactly. He walked in and out bold as brass, and he—see for yourself."

He aimed mitt at big open doors on right, entrance to small lodge auditorium. Rows of folding chairs were set up show-style. There were musical instruments, mikes, juggler's clubs, other vaude apparati on stage. The piece of equipment nearest the blacked-out foots was a large marimba, mostly colored green.

"Wow, that's a real smear job, Unc."

"Yes, somebody came in here last night and threw a quart or so of green paint all over Wanda Jean Finch's perfectly good $500 marimba. Ruined it for fair. Oh, we've got the culprit, but he won't talk. And we don't know how he managed it. Worse, I'm pretty certain about who's really responsible, but I'm jiggered if I can figure out how to prove it. You know how Sheriff Gus Gumley is, Woodrow. A mite of mystery and he sends out for help. Namely me. This time I'm stumped. Well, let's see if Wanda Jean has calmed down any."

As we ankled for chamber from which the howls issued, I asked, "Is that musical gear for the variety show I saw advertised outside?"

"Yes, 'tis."

"But what's it got to do with tooth decay?"

Further eludication was prevented by our entrance into chamber where four persons were assembled. First was 7-yr.-old juve all dolled up in banana curls and sobbing heart out. Mother, a young jane, was attempting to console her.

Also present was older gent in Oshkosh B'gosh work togs. He sat in a chair pulled out in room's center. He had several stogies sticking out of his shirt pocket. He was scratching stubbly chin and looking vacant in gray cells dept. I pegged him as lodge hall handyman, harmless old coot named Luther Small. Standing over Small was fatty in Sam Browne belt who failed to recognize me.

"Pinkerton," cried Sheriff, "I won't stand for those fluoridation folks sending a hotshot lawyer in here to bedevil us!"

"Woodrow, take off those sunglasses. Gus, it's my nephew."

"What's he wearing that sissified suit for?" Gumley retorted.

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Was no time to comment on lack of knowledgeability of stix hix re notched lapels and side vents. Couldn't have anyway, as tot burst out afresh, wailing, "Oh, mummy, mummy, you promised I could play for the peoples tonight."

Gumley glared at his captive. "See what you caused, Luther?"

Old Luther had a guilty puss, but he was stubborn. "I di'nt do nothin', and I'm not sayin' nothin' more."

"Now Luther," Unc said, "if somebody has bulldozed you into clamming up, you ought to realize that Sheriff Gumley here exerts a lot more influence, relatively speaking."

Luther Small scuffed work brogans on flooring. He looked trembly and scared, but he had plenty of ginger left. "Di'nt do it. If you think I did, where's the paint can, hannh? Where's the paint I shoulda had all over my fingers, hannh?"

He held up mitts, which showed no traces of green. I had my notepad out, scribbling away. Variety show tie-in possibly meant hotsy copy for *GALORE*.

Unc sighed. "Gus, I'm afraid he's got us licked. Are you positive your boys searched the lodge hall top to bottom?"

"Yes, Pinky, I am. No empty cans of green paint anywhere. And Luther didn't have nary a stain or smudge when Deputy Booth picked him up after he came out of the lodge hall at 11:30 last night."

"Oh, mummy," tot burst out, "I wanna play for the peoples, I wanna, I wanna!"

Young mom feverishly attempted to soothe offspring. "Hush, Wanda Jean, we'll get you a new marimba, I promise. You can play *I'm Putting All My Eggs in One Basket* another time. Oh, I wish they'd never brought up that awful fluoride business anyway! Come on, Wanda Jean. We'll come back later and see if the big thinkers have found the guilty person."

Mother cradled tot to bosom and team exited. Words "big thinkers" caused Gumley to sigh and Unc to shake his head in mystified way. Wanda Jean went baaw in distance. Door slammed.

"Psst, Unc," I said. "Fill me in?"

Unc nodded in his absent-minded way and said, "Gus, I want to have another look in the basement. That's where I ran into you-know-who Thursday night." Luther seemed to know who too. He gave a shudder like extra in Karloff pic.

"Luther's scared to death," Unc muttered after he had shut the door behind us. "And I know who's scaring him. But proving it is something else again."

I urged Unc to take it from the top as we tramped down into musty basement occupied by large workbench, tools, junk, oil containers, big coal furnace out of use now that June had arrived, and a janitor's closet. I stood scrivening

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in my notebook while Unc gave synopsis of action thus far.

Two elements in Weevers were warring over a big issue—viz., whether to add fluoride to drinking water supply come fall. Some locals were for it. Other, and more vociferous element, was equally strong against, considering it part of subversive plot to poison U.S. body fluids. Pro-fluoride folks had decided to mount pub-rel campaign in local paper and on Radio Station WEEV. This took cash nut. Hence variety show, to feature terping, thesping, vaude acts by fluoride proponents and their small fry. However, very rental of lodge hall to this group had touched off brouhaha.

"We had a lively go-round at the lodge board meeting Thursday night. Those of us who thought there was no harm in renting the hall outvoted the others four to two. The one loudest against renting is the sanctimonious windbag I suspect has got Luther Small buffaloed—namely, our chairman of the Buildings and Grounds Committee, C. Harold Bixby. Remember him?"

"Think so. Premium pusher?"

Unc cocked an eyebrow. "In exactly what tongue are you speaking, Woodrow?"

"'Scuse me, Unc. Bixby's in the insurance rack—business."

"Right. He's not only anti-fluoride, he's anti almost anything you can name, from nicotine to *I Love You Truly* at weddings. I don't object to him being against things, mind you—that's his right. But I surely do object to his talking poor Luther into an act of vandalism designed to sabotage the fund-raising show. I know he did it—feel it in my bones. It's logical, too. Being chairman of buildings and grounds at the lodge, he can throw Luther out of a job overnight. And Luther, being Luther, couldn't come by another job very easy."

"Bixby against everything," I muttered, writing. "O. o. b. b."

"Beg pardon, Woodrow?"

"Optics of beholder bit."

Unc cast eyes heavenward, then gazed at old pine workbench upon which reposed tin lunch pail bearing initials *LS* scratched in side with knife point.

Unc stared at the initials, finally said, "Proving Bixby twisted Luther's arm so he'd throw paint on the marimba is only half the problem, Woodrow. Bixby has an alibi—tight as a drum. He was down at the rummage sale last evening helping his wife out till they closed. Then he and his missus invited some friends over till way past 11:30, which is when Deputy Booth caught Luther sneaking out of here. Gus Gumley made some phone inquiries this morning." Unc stopped running index digit aimlessly round and round brown ring stain left on pine surface. Puss glum, he wound up, "Bixby's alibi is solid."

"How come the deputy picked

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up Small? I mean, being handyman, doesn't he have the right to be in the lodge hall at night?"

"Yes, but his behavior roused Deputy Booth's suspicions. On the nights when Deputy Booth is on duty, he usually parks his car right across the street to keep an eye on Main Street. The lodge hall closes up about 11:00. Last night Deputy Booth saw nobody go in or come out after that hour until Luther showed up at 11:25. Luther seemed to be sort of sneaking into the building around the side, but Deputy Booth spotted him. And he recollected that Luther had been in a scrape a couple of years ago."

"What kind of scrape?"

"Luther got pressed for funds and dipped into the lodge cash box one night after hours. He got off that time because everybody in Weevers felt sorry for him. Last night Deputy Booth remembered the scrape when Luther came sneaking back out of here, exactly five minutes after he went in. Deputy Booth jumped out of his car and yelled to Luther, who jackrabbited off."

"Then what happened?"

"Oh, Booth collared him easy enough. And poor Luther, caught flat, bleated out a lame story. According to the deputy, Luther said he'd just come back for his lunch things, which he maintained he forgot. All right, said the deputy, then where are your lunch things? Well, Luther wasn't carrying anything at all, so it was pretty obvious he was scared, muddled, and saying the first thing that came into his head. So with Luther still yowling, they went back inside, just for a check. And there, all over the marimba, was fresh green paint, wet as a tadpole in a pond."

Possibility of *GALORE* copy under my *Woody* byline caused me to exclaim, "Socko! Unreel the next skein quick!"

Next skein was nub of other half of problem. To bedaub marimba, Luther had to have a can of paint. He was carrying nothing with him when he went into lodge and, as reported, nothing when he came out. Outer apparel consisted of just a skimpy jacket as it was a warm pleasant evening. No possibility of concealing can on person. And there was not a stain or smudge of green on his hands.

"Now it certainly seems likely, Woodrow, that a man is going to spill just a spot or two somewhere on his person if he opens a can of paint and lets fly. But not Luther Deputy Booth and his men searched this place all over. No paint cans or lids anywhere. No in that furnace—not in the trash barrels out back—not even in Luther's lunch pail here on the bench. Not in any place big enough to hold an empty paint can. So where did Luther get the paint and how did he get rid of the can?"

Big sigh. Unc ran finger along edge of the workbench, where a

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half-dollar-size blob of dried green paint contrasted with light pine-wood. Unc stared at green blob.

"I didn't notice that before. Wonder if Luther came down here last night and spilled some of his paint on the workbench getting the can open? Then where's the can? Oh, fiddlesticks! Come along, Woodrow. I spent enough time in this basement Thursday night, and I'm fed up."

So saying, he led march back upstairs. We looked into quiz chamber, discovered Gumley alone and morose in facial dept.

"Pinky, you got to come up with something. Luther absolutely won't talk."

"Knows he's got us over a barrel," Unc opined.

"How about a little rubber hose scene?" I suggested.

"In those films you are required to sit through for your work, Woodrow, maybe. But we folks in Weevers don't do things in that way. Your Aunt should be home from the rummage sale about now. She'll fix us some lunch. Gus, I'll phone you if I get a hot flash."

"Yow!" I said. "Scheme snags tooth tuner."

"Has he drunk some intoxicating beverage, Pinky?" Sheriff said.

"No, Gus. A tuner is, I believe, a musical show. Woodrow is just composing another of those headlines in his paper's peculiar lingo." Unc grinned, but sans heart. Many frixamples could be given of how Unc had saved local police bacon, and he was doubtless feeling current failure keenly as we took his Chev coupe out Elm to the digs.

On the way, per my request, Unc explained earlier reference to activities Thurs. eve. in lodge cellar.

Seems that after rent-or-not-to-rent vote, C. Harold Bixby had stalked out, refusing to sit in meeting any longer with "parlor pink named Pinkerton." Meeting broke up about an hour later. Unc, who is stanch Repub., was still doing slow burn over Bixby crack. He located Bixby in dingy cellar where "self-important frog" had gone to "make routine weekly inspection."

Unc filled in scene, picturing C. Harold Bixby as portly do-gooder garbed in size 46 blue pinstripe and size 13 shoes.

"There he was, leaning back against that workbench puffing a cloud of cigar smoke in my face and telling me to go jump in the lake. I said anybody who walked out of a meeting the way he did was a crybaby. But he just stood planted there with his elbows resting on the workbench and kept puffing away. He promised to make sure I was voted off the lodge hall board because I was a dangerous radical. I don't often get the urge to punch anybody in the nose, but I got it then, so I walked out."

"That's real gutsy meller material, Unc," I said as we swung in drive.

"Now Woodrow, try to control

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your racy jargon. Aunt Ellen's home."

As we entered kitchen, Aunt E. turned, did double take and flustered bit, patting her gray bun and fiddling with specs. "Woodrow! Mercy on us, what are you doing here long before your vacation?"

Following buss and squeezes, I scenarioed stranding at Cincy airport.

"Sit down, Woodrow. There's cherry pie just coming out of the oven." Aunt E. paused for sad-but-loving expresh. "You look undernourished. Have you been consorting too much with those loose-living theatrical persons?"

"Been in Vegas covering a preem of a Blighty rocker troupe, Aunt."

"If I interpret my free subscription copies correctly," Unc put in, "that means he was attending the first performance of some English music group with soup-bowl haircuts."

Aunt Ellen pulled out her freshly heated pie. "Well, I do wish you'd go to bed a little earlier. Somehow it doesn't seem quite American rising at noon like you do. And that reminds me. That picture you sent of those girls dancing —was that in public?"

"Natch," I grinned. "Frisco diskery nitery."

"Oh, dear. And I still remember when you used to raise mushrooms in flats in the basement. You be careful, young man! Sleep under that comforter I sent you. Pinkerton! Are you falling asleep?"

Unc blinked, chin resting on palms, elbows on table. He screwed up his face in that thoughtful way of his. "No, I was just wondering what I'm missing. I think I've got all the pieces, yet I can't put 'em together. Meanwhile, C. Harold Bixby is getting away scot-free, Wanda Jean Finch's marimba is ruined, and Gus Gumley can't make Luther Small talk."

Rapidly Unc described latest developments to Aunt E. as we attacked chow. He mentioned Bixby alibi.

"Well," Aunt E. said, "I can vouch that Harold Bixby was present at the rummage sale from seven until ten last night, Pinkerton. He was helping his wife Grace the way he does every year. The place was packed, too. As for the Bixby party later, I wasn't invited. Grace Bixby is obviously mad as a hornet because of your row with Harold at the lodge. I met her at the door as she was bringing in some men's clothes last night and she cut me dead. Not that I care a fig. I must say Harold acted a mite peculiar too. He dropped in a while this morning and he was still acting the same way."

Unc dropped fork with clatter. "Peculiar? Explain yourself, woman."

"Nervous. Fidgety as a tick. He was watching the folks buying the dishes and clothes and books. This

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morning he kept whizzing around the church basement like an express train."

"Thunderation, that's it!" Unc jumped up, did nifty jig.

"Pinkerton! Have you got the St. Vitus dance?"

"Ellen, I see how he—oh." Unc's shoulders slumped. "I believe I have Bixby, but that's not enough. I still don't know how Luther hid the paint or kept his hands clean. Think I'll drive over and discuss it with Gus some more. Coming, Woodrow?"

"You bet."

Escaped house before Aunt E. could press extra glass of cow extract into my hand. As Unc drove, I recalled being out of shv. crm. He doubleparked at Atwater's Drug Store while I ran in. He seemed off in outer spheres when I slid back into seat.

"What's that you have, Woodrow?"

"Just the shave bomb I bought in the pill parlor, Unc."

"Shave cream. Drug store. *My* store! Right under my own nose all the time. Woodrow, quick! Park the car and meet me at the hardware store. I'm going to phone Gus. At last I've got that sneaky Bixby red—er, green-handed." Out he hopped.

Fearing Unc had really flipped this time, I ditched lather on car seat, parked per order, and awaited his return. I leaned against the hardware frontage while rurals gave the o.o. to tassels on my cordovans. In about 10 mins. Unc came racing up sidewalk, a bulgy paper sack tucked under arm.

"What's in the bag, Unc?"

"Something which absolutely had to be around the lodge someplace, Woodrow, even though I never actually saw it myself."

"What is—?"

"Let's not waste time. Gus Gumley will meet us at Bixby's. If I can crack Harold, that'll make Luther talk."

I wondered about nature of fade-out if Bixby were innocent as lamb and sued for false arrest. However, following Unc allowed no time for speculation. He plunged inside a first-floor office door featuring cornball copy—BIXBY INSURANCE, *"C. Harold" For Your Coverage.*

Overstuffed sec'y. babe did not immediately think I was with Unc, announced that presence of "hawkers" was discouraged. Unc said I was in party and was Bixby in back office? Babe started to say nix when Gumley arrived, puffing.

"Pinky, what in fire are you up to?"

"Just follow me, Gus. Don't announce us, Rosemary, we'll go right in." Unc pushed through swing gate.

With Gumley looking worried, me feeling same, we charged ahead into large office. Human mastodon in blue pinstripe of Ringling tent proportions ceased shuffling papers

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behind desk. Mastodon scowled while tiny eyes glared at Unc amidst lotsa flesh.

"Pinkerton, I resent your barging in here. I have nothing more to say to anarchists."

"But I've got a lot to say, Harold, concerning a mean act of vandalism rigged up to ruin the variety show."

"Oh, I did hear something about that," said C. Harold. "But only in passing. Say, who's this debauched-looking lad? Some egg-head agitator?"

"This is my nephew Woodrow Ennis."

C. Harold clutched paunch. "Woodrow Ennis! He used to roll a hoop past here every night on the way home from school. He was clean-cut and wholesome. This specimen has obviously had his bodily fluids poisoned by the conspiracy which is now sweeping—"

"Be quiet, Harold," Unc said. "You have a right to your opinions, but when you start cat's-pawing poor Luther Small to spoil a show put on by people who happen to disagree with you, I get mad."

"Pinky," Gumley stage-whispered, "don't make rash accusations."

"Did you make that phone call, Gus?"

"Yes, but I'll be switched if I see why."

"Let me worry about that, Gus."

"Just a minute here," said Bixby, big sneer on map. "Do you propose to give me a lecture on fluoridation, Pinkerton? I suppose you think it's healthful."

"When I render an opinion, Harold, I'll do it in the ballot box, not after dark using a poor fuzzy-witted janitor as a dupe."

C. Harold turned ripe red in jowl dept. Gumley looked petrified as Unc went on, "Specifically, Harold, I think you decided when you lost the rent vote that you had to stop the fund-raising show. After you stalked out of the board meeting, I think you went home and got the particular can of green paint. Then you came back to the lodge with your scheme fully hatched. I think you found Luther Small puttering around in the basement, and you threatened to have him fired unless he helped out. That's when I came downstairs to give you what-for."

Premium pusher puffed in pump-organ fashion, "Nothing but a pack of outrageous—"

"Do me the courtesy of letting me finish, Harold. When I found you in the lodge basement, I think you were putting Luther through his paces—showing him what to do with the paint so he wouldn't get caught by leaving evidence behind. Folks in Weevers know you're against vice of every sort, as I mentioned to my nephew earlier today. You're against sin, gin, and also nicotine. And yet there you were Thursday night, leaning against the workbench and blowing cigar smoke in my face.

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"It's my opinion you grabbed that cigar out of Luther's pocket and lit up when you heard me coming. You hate products of the weed. But Luther doesn't—in fact, he had some cigars in his shirt pocket this morning. You heard me coming downstairs, shoved Luther into the janitor's closet, sacrificed your principles, and puffed up a real smoke-screen. I was so riled it didn't dawn on me then—you don't smoke but you *had* to Thursday night. Because, Harold, you'd been showing Luther how to use the paint. *And paint smells.*"

What a performance! I'd eyeballed smokeys in Luther's togs pocket also, but failed to link same with earlier anti-nicotine fact stated by Unc. Bixby gnawed liver lips and rolled eyes as if seeking escape hatch.

Unc pressed on. "Further, Harold, in demonstrating how Luther was to do the job you got some green paint on the edge of the workbench. So you leaned against the bench kind of nonchalant-like and didn't move the whole time I was there. Otherwise I'd have seen that paint which I did see, dried, this very morning."

"Then where's the paint can?" snapped C.H.B. "The way I hear it, Gumley's boys couldn't find it anywhere in the lodge hall."

"That's where we got temporarily snookered," replied Unc. "Gus's boys searched every cranny in the lodge that might have hidden a round, squat, ordinary-type paint can of quart size or less. But like everything else these days, cans have changed. There's another style of paint can for sale most everywhere. You probably had one around home. I sell 'em right in my own hardware store. I was reminded about it when Woodrow stopped in at the drug store. Y'see, Harold, I'm old-fashioned—I still use shaving soap in a mug. But Woodrow here is modern. He buys those lather bombs. Those spray cans. And today, Harold, *paint comes in spray cans too.*"

"Of all the crazy—!"

"Tall, thin, round cans, Harold. With a nice, neat spray nozzle that you just press. Hold a can like that far enough away from you and if you're careful you don't get a single drop on your clothes. Or even on your hands."

"But we didn't find any new-fangled aerosol paint cans neither, Pinky," protested Sheriff G.

" 'Course you didn't. You didn't search in the right-shaped place."

"In the what?"

"You said your boys looked in lots of odd places, like Luther Small's lunch pail down in the basement. But they passed up something else which I found just a while ago, tucked way back in a corner of the janitor's closet." Unc waved paper bag.

"No fair!" I said. "We didn't look in the closet before."

"Now, Woodrow, don't be thick.

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I told you I didn't have to look. The evidence not only said what the hiding place had to be, but exactly what it looked like, too. We know Luther couldn't have carried it out, so it was just a matter of finding it. If your boys spotted it at all, Gus, they must have passed it up because of the shape problem."

Shaking dome vigorously, I said, "Beats me."

"Remember," Unc said, "the first thing Luther hollered when Deputy Booth caught him was that he'd forgot his lunch things. Luther was making up a story, all right. But he was blurting out the truth too, in a kind of slantwise way. He was guilty as sin, and when he thought up that excuse quick, he also automatically thought about the hiding place of the evidence against him. Luther definitely said lunch things, *plural.* Deputy Booth even repeated it. Now Woodrow, what goes along with a packed lunch and, if it spills, leaves a brown ring like the one we saw on the workbench plain as day?"

"Yipes. Jamoko!"

"I guess you're trying to say coffee. You're right. Now, what one thing on earth holds coffee, but could also hold a tall, thin, round spray can of paint, and goes with a lunch pail—lunch things plural—as surely as eggs are the other half of ham?"

Presto! Unc whipped open paper bag and took out an old, battered qt. Thermos.

Bottle had red plastic drinking cup screwed upside down onto top. Unc unscrewed this, pulled plastic jug plug, then unscrewed top part of outside cylinder. He lifted off this smaller upper part, turned over larger bottom cylinder—and bingo! out dropped not a shiny glass liner but a tall, round aerosol can of *E-Z-Glos Spra-E-Namel,* #314 *LEAFY BOWER GREEN.*

Bixby lamped can on carpet like it was tarantula.

"Neat fit," Unc said. "Nice hideout, too. Luther gets the paint out of the Thermos bottle, ruins the marimba, puts the can back for disposal later. And it almost worked, except for Woodrow needing a shave."

Right then Bixby zipped around from behind the desk, shaking fist. "You rotten, radical meddler—you still haven't got a nickel's worth of proof."

"Not here—no, that's right, I haven't."

Mother! thought I. Here's where Unc's carpet gets pulled.

"You admit there's no proof?" Bixby said, suddenly narrow in eye region.

Unc fielded fast. "I said I don't have any proof *here,* Harold. I have a notion the proof is over at the Presbyterian Church rummage sale. I phoned Gus, and he has a deputy looking for it now. I'm speaking of one blue pinstripe suitcoat, the only kind you wear. This one probably has a green stain

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down around the seat of the coat—a stain you got leaning up against the workbench so I couldn't see the spill Thursday night.

"The way I figure it, Harold, maybe you didn't know how to get rid of that coat without rousing suspicion. You couldn't, for example, throw it in your furnace, or in the one at the lodge hall. This being June, and warm, and all furnaces shut down, anything burning in a furnace would be noticed right off. Or maybe you didn't realize right away that the coat was stained.

"I bet you sneaked the coat home. Then lo and behold, in typical fashion, as a lot of men with wives can testify, your wife went through your things yesterday, looking for rummage when you weren't around. She found the paint-stained coat and took it to the church. My wife saw Grace bringing in some men's clothes. The suitcoat being in the batch would certainly explain why you acted, as I get it, so dang nervous at the sale last night. Why you watched to see who bought what. Why you went back this morning to see if the coat was still there.

"Because I guess you know, Harold, there isn't much of a market in Weevers for size 46 suits, not since Chubby Henderson moved away, anyhow. With so many people milling around, you'd have to wait until tonight—until the sale was over—to get that suit back and dispose of it. Taking one of your own garments off the rack during the sale would just have called attention to it. Yes, I'll wager you've been pretty nervous, Harold, waiting for that rummage sale to wind up so you could destroy the evidence we're going to use to make Luther Small confess."

Loud confabbing in outer office caused all parties to rotate heads. Deputy Sheriff bearing clothing item had entered premium pusher's premises. Even from inner office, green stain on blue pinstripe was highly visible.

Bixby wilted instanter. Gumley collared him.

"Come along, Harold. You should be ashamed of yourself."

"Second that," said Unc with nod.

"Take your hands off me!" Bixby jerked arm from Sheriff's grip. "As for you, Pinkerton—I hope you're satisfied, and will continue to be satisfied when the fluorides of which you are in favor poison all your bodily fluids. I'll get a lawyer. I'll fight this, don't you think I won't."

So mouthing, guilty party was taken away. Faithful sec'y. appeared ready to expire from shock.

Unc hitched up his wash pants, bent down, retrieved the paint can. He deposited same in paper bag again with parts of Thermos. "Let's be going, Woodrow. I haven't put in a lick of work at the store today.

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I have several things to wind up before we go out to eat."

We ankled to street. "Eating any place special, Unc?"

"Yes, I'm treating you and your Aunt Ellen to cube steaks and all the trimmings at Hadley's Hickory Heaven before the show. I also have to pick up an extra—ducat, is it?—for you. I'll bet little Wanda Jean electrifies the folks tonight."

"But her marimba's kaput!"

"Oh, Wanda Jean also studies the novelty tap. She's a real trouper though only age seven."

"Unc, I thought tonight's gig had already done El Foldo!"

"What ever gave you that idea?"

"You mean the amateur show must go on?"

Eyes a-twinkle, Unc said, "Certainly, Woodrow. That's show biz."

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Archer, Frank	THE WIDOW WATCHERS	Doubleday	$3.50	12/3
Eastwood, James	THE CHINESE VISITOR	Coward-McCann	4.50	12/3
Fish, Robert L.	BRAZILIAN SLEIGH RIDE	Simon & Schuster	3.50	12/10
Mullally, Frederic	THE ASSASSINS	Walker & Co.	3.50	12/8
Robertson, L. M.	FREDERIKA AND THE CONVICT	Doubleday	3.50	12/3
Sanders, John	A FIREWORK FOR OLIVER	Walker & Co.	3.50	12/13
Underwood, Michael	THE ANXIOUS CONSPIRATOR	Doubleday	3.50	12/3
Woods, Sara	THE WINDY SIDE OF THE LAW	Harper & Row	3.95	12/15
Wuorio, E. L.	Z FOR ZABORRA	Holt, Rinehart & Winston	3.50	1/31
Zeiger, Henry A.	IAN FLEMING: THE SPY WHO CAME IN WITH THE GOLD	Meredith Press	4.95	11/29

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Eberhart, Mignon G.	THE WHITE DRESS	Popular Library	$ .50	12/2
Hamilton, Donald	THE DEVASTATORS	Gold Medal (Orig.)	.50	11/30
MacDonald, John D.	THE PRICE OF MURDER	Gold Medal (Orig.)	.50	11/30
Roberts, James Hall	THE Q DOCUMENT	Crest	.60	12/14
White, Ethel Lina	THE SPIRAL STAIRCASE	Popular Library	.50	12/16

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What is the special fascination of stories about college Professors? Especially those who teach English Lit and can quote T. S. Eliot to fit even the most shocking, sophisticated, and outrageous situations?

TIME TO MURDER

by J. N. WILLIAMSON

PROFESSOR BALO WAS MORE pleased than his somewhat dour face showed when he learned that they had canceled the remainder of classes for the day. To his students, of course, he had revealed merely the faint crinkling of those vertical lines directly above the nosepiece of his horn-rimmed glasses, and a tic-like movement of the muscles at the left side of his mouth.

But only the most perceptive students had noticed—the Professor was not a demonstrative man. He was an enigma, or say, rather, a dull puzzle (since enigma carries with it a hint of attraction). No one was particularly interested in the impassive Balo, who gave an untroubled passing mark to all except the habitual class cutters and the defiantly ignorant. He graded "on the curve," was prompt, maintained order, and taught English Lit with the warmth of a self-absorbed math professor.

Balo had achieved all this by the time he turned forty. He was the envy of the faculty at Brattle University.

Freed from the dolts in his last two classes of the day, Professor Balo struggled into an outsized tweed topcoat, screwed on his proper hat, flitted like an avant-garde passage down the corridors and out into a midwestern winter. Thick snow was generous to the campus; it continued dispatching its largess as the professor squinted into the early darkness. Snow for 48 hours! Balo shuddered invisibly beneath his heavy coat and was reminded, suddenly, of Harvard.

The powers-that-be in Cambridge would never have closed down. No, not back home. The theory at Harvard was that even if one student came to class he deserved his daily instruction. It was a workable theory which quite cloaked the fact that most of the pupils lived in nearby dormitories and apartment houses.

Here in Indianapolis a sizable percentage of the student body lived at home. Hundreds of parents, most of them alumni or alumnae, would resent the task of coping with the safe transportation of their offspring.

Balo's black Ford seemed to lo-

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cate all the half-hidden tire ruts. As he drove, his headlights cutting the gloom, the Professor felt again the rising, wry wonder that an Easterner had somehow found his way to this cultural abyss. It was wonderment, not actually a question, for Balo knew why he was here. Home-tied Margie, beautiful young Margie, would not return with him to the East.

Loving her was one thing; being able to tolerate even another semester at Brattle was quite another. Balo could make do with obscurity, with failing to see "Theodore Balo, M.A., Ph.D." beneath the name of a respectable quarterly—but *substituting* Indianapolis for Cambridge and New York was worse than an actual lack! Somehow, Margie had to be persuaded to share a sabattical with him.

The janitors had not cleared away the snow in the apartment building's parking lot, and it was necessary for Balo to step daintily as he left the proper little car out front. His mouth muscles protested silently; this sort of thing was never permitted back East. Why, had he chosen selectively *there*, picked the right apartment building, his car would have been parked for him! He sighed as his eyes journeyed upward, seeking his own cozy flat. At least, Margie, his bourgeois beauty, the toast of the provinces, awaited him.

The automated elevator lifted Balo to the top floor. When he reached his apartment the keys fell from his cold hands and the slender Professor pawed in the cheap rug until he located them. Twice he selected the wrong key; but at last everything coordinated and he opened the door.

Balo blinked twice behind his thick glasses, getting accustomed to the semidarkness. "Hello." He did not raise his voice. "Prexy shut us down, if you can imagine such a thing. Too much snow for the little darlings."

"I'm in the bedroom, Theo."

"Oh." He hung his topcoat in the closet, then knelt to remove his shoes. As an afterthought he peeled off the wet socks and let his toes luxuriate in the fine Oriental he had thoughtfully brought with him to the wasteland. The muscle tic beside his thin mouth subsided as he padded to the bedroom. "Well, so there you are. Aren't you feeling well?'

Margie looked up from the bed, wanly. She shook her head. "Nothing serious. I guess I'm catching a cold or something."

"No wonder, no wonder at all in this God-forsaken place." Balo bent to kiss her forehead, a nicely rounded object engulfed by onrushing blonde curls. They had captivated him from the first, those curls—so delightfully absurd in this day and age when all the smart women wore their hair short. "You don't appear to have a fever. Have you taken your temperature?"

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Margie shook her head a second time. "No, not yet. I'll be fine, dear."

Balo absently fingered what passed for a sleeve barely covering her still-tanned shoulder. "My, my. Your best nightgown. That's the one I bought for you back East, isn't it?" She nodded. "Im*port*ed it here, in effect. Postal people had to fight off the savages in the surrounding villages just to get it through to you. Why?"

Margie's face was blank. "Why what?"

"Why your best nightgown at two in the afternoon?"

She shrugged delicately. "Why not?"

Balo allowed himself a smile. "I can do nothing with such unassailable logic. Really, darling, you missed your calling."

"Not entirely," Margie said.

"Oh, I meant no offense to your wifely status. Well, I think I'll take a hot bath, then read a while. Would you like me to read anything special to you this evening?"

"Anything you wish, Theo. Who am I to quarrel with your selections?"

"Tease."

"You're staying home then, Theo?" she asked.

"I scarcely think that I'd be removing my trousers to go back out in *that* blizzard. Carter, that friend of mine who dabbles in meteorology, said this is the worst snowfall in sixteen years. He anticipates that snow will fall for another two days. Rigged the whole show just for me, I think. That damned fog doesn't help a bit either—can scarcely see a thing outside. Not a soul on the streets."

Balo held the bottoms of his trousers between his teeth as he searched for the creases, then draped the trousers carefully on a coat hanger. "Remind me to pick up a clamp, won't you?"

"Theo darling, I was thinking. Maybe it would be a good idea if I took something for this cold. Would you mind going around the corner to Hook's?"

"Yes, I mind." The vertical lines between his eyes sharpened. "You could have said something before I—What was that?"

"What was what?"

"The noise. Sounded like someone outside."

"On the twelfth floor?" She laughed lightly. "A cat burglar couldn't get up the side of this building, dear. It's sheer wall."

"Nevertheless, I did hear a noise." Balo, his head tilted slightly to a listening position, hurried across the bedroom to the window. It was open an inch. He raised the window and blinked in the thrust of snow-choked air. Cautiously, holding onto his glasses with one veined hand, he put his head out.

A second man, also without trousers, was propped against the side of the building. His arms were outstretched above him, the palms

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of his hands against the wall. The faintly blue legs, which were what Balo saw initially, were excessively muscular and they disappeared into an athletic supporter.

Balo's eyes, traveling up, discovered that the other man's eyes were wide and staring. His sun-bleached hair was in a Hollywood trim which somehow managed to be whipped in the wind. He was perhaps fifteen years younger than Balo—just about Margie's age.

"Don't I know you?" Balo asked casually.

"What?"

It was clearly necessary to yell. "I said, don't I *know* you?"

"Yes." The other man had paused before shouting his reply. "I was in a class of yours last year—English Lit II. You gave me a C-minus. I almost flunked off the football team."

"Oh, I remember now. You're Crandall, Joe Crandall. You begged me."

"Randall," the second man yelled. "With an R. I pleaded."

"Well, what are you doing out there?"

There was a more extensive pause. "That's hard to say."

"Did you want to see me about something?" Balo persisted.

"Why, yes. Yes. My grade. I wanted to ask you again about it"

"You have a peculiar manner of approaching one," the Professor remarked wryly.

"What?"

"I said you should see me at the university. Not here." Balo pulled his head back in and started to close the window.

"Wait!"

Balo sighed. "What do you want, Mr. Crandall?"

"Well, sir, in a sort of—well, in a way I came to see your wife. That is, Mrs. Balo. First. I thought she could—could—"

"Intercede?"

"That's it. I thought she could intercede for me."

"You were mistaken."

There was a vicious blast of cold air. "What?"

"I said that you were mistaken, Mr. Crandall, in error. My grades are irrevocable, like death. Like the wages of sin. All that." Balo started to retreat into his bedroom, then paused. "Where are your trousers?"

"Why, I'm not exactly sure. Not as to ex*act*ly where they are, you understand."

"Peculiar, young man. Damned peculiar. Aren't you cold out there?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact, I am."

"I'm sure no one *forced* you out there. It's a free society. You had a choice."

"Do I have a choice now?"

"What?"

"Nothing."

The Professor sighed again. "I am going in—heights bother my blood pressure. Drop in at school, Crandall—say, Tuesday next. We'll talk about your grade then."

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Randall shot a quick look down, winced, then looked up again. "I'm not sure I can make it till Tuesday."

"In a hell of a hurry all at once, aren't you? After a semester?"

"Actually two semesters, Professor Balo."

"I still don't understand. Why are you in such a rush?"

"Well, I could come in and sort of ex*plain* it to you," Randall yelled.

"Without your trousers? Certainly not. Entirely out of the question. Much too irregular."

"Perhaps your wife could find them for me? I seem to remember seeing them there last."

"Where? In the living room? Where, specifically?"

Randall paused. "I *think* they were in the bedroom. Maybe on the bed." Randall shivered. "If you'd just ask Mrs. Balo. Please. She might remember."

Balo went back into the room, brushing snow from his eyebrows. "Margie, there is a student of mine out there. An ex-student, that is, if you can call him a student. Named Crandall."

"Randall."

"He thinks you might know where his trousers are. Wants to come in to talk with me, and he hasn't a thing on but those ridiculous things athletes wear. Nervy midwestern sports type. Probably a fullback."

"Quarterback." Margie rummaged in the covers on her bed, her breasts swinging under the sheer gown. Abruptly she made a small exultant sound. "I wonder if these could be his trousers."

"I should hope so, darling. How many different men leave their trousers on your bed?" He chuckled and held up the pants. "Rhetorical question, naturally. Hmm. Cheap flannel. Bought them in some chain clothing store, I'll bet—just walked in and picked 'em off a rack." He went back to the window and called out, "Are these your trousers?"

"Yes, those are mine."

"You're pretty fast about it, Mr. Crandall. There's so much snow and fog I cannot imagine how you could be certain. You seem to be pretty fast about a great many things. Can you *ident*ify these trousers?"

Randall took as deep a breath as he could, under the circumstances. "They're flannel. Gray. Leather belt, western style."

"So they are. That should do it." Balo stretched a fraction of an inch as he extended his arm. "Do hope that you can put them on—out there, I mean. Should be rather an interesting balancing act. Wind's getting stronger."

"I'll get them on, all right." Randall reached for his trousers.

The trousers, as if caught by a sudden sharp and vagrant gust of wind, fell.

"Damned midwestern winter." Balo glanced down, carefully

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clutching the right shaft of his horn-rimmed glasses. "Sorry about that, young man. But the wind—you understand, of course."

Randall, his face a mixture of fear and dismay, raised his head slowly. "You know, I think I *do* understand. I guess you wouldn't want to go down there to retrieve those pants for me, would you?"

"No."

"And you still won't let me in without them?"

"Certainly not. Highly irregular."

"Professor Balo, do you realize that your apartment is a corner one and that this ledge extends only a few feet on either side of your window? Do you realize that I have no way to get down from here *except* through your bedroom?"

"Oh, another way might occur to you. An adventure in imagination, a rare flight of insight, and *there* is your alternative."

"I see." Randall's eyes followed the Professor's downward pointing finger.

"I rather thought you would. But Crandall, there is no reason you can't come through here after we *leave* the room. No reason in the world. Of course, you can't properly go out in the street like that. Hence, I offer you the choice of my own trousers. Take any pair you prefer, although they probably won't look well over those muscular legs of yours."

There was a howling burst of wind and snow, and the younger man's teeth began to chatter more noticeably than before. He shook his head slightly, dislodging several inches of snow. "M-may I ask, sir, when you expect to l-leave your room?"

Balo's smile matched the frostiness of the air. "A friend of mine named Carter, who dabbles in meteorology, says we can expect this weather to continue for two days. Oh, and the temperature will probably drop to ten below by midnight. Frankly, it appears that cold to me right now. I'm *freez*ing to death with this window open. Well, good evening."

"Wait!"

"What is it?"

"Professor, there just isn't *time* for me to wait out here until you leave your apartment."

"Nonsense, Mr. Crandall. What were those lines of T. S. Eliot that you couldn't recall in class? 'There will be time to murder and create'? Oh, yes. 'Time for you and time for me, And time yet for a hundred indecisions, And for a hundred visions and revisions, Before the taking of a toast and tea.' I commend the 'visions and revisions' to you, young man."

"I remember them now, sir!"

"Then consider yourself given an advanced, altered mark, Mr. Crandall. You now have a final B-minus. Incidentally, I have a good New England lock on this window. I'm a prudent fellow, you

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know. Any prowlers on that ledge of yours would have to break the window, and there isn't actually enough space to swing one's arm with the proper leverage. Besides—" Balo put a tentative index finger on the ledge—"there seems to be a nasty coat of ice."

He pulled the window down and locked it securely. He then closed the curtains and turned back to his wife, whose youthful lips were parted. He loved her blonde curls with his eyes, which he then lifted heavenward.

"Margie, we simply *must* take a sabbatical after this blizzard breaks. Your health virtually insists on it. That, and those next lines of Eliot's: 'No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be; Am an attendant lord, one that will do . . .' Most earnestly, my darling, one that will *have* to do."

NEXT MONTH . . .

HERCULE POIROT short novel—complete!

AGATHA CHRISTIE's

Hercule Poirot and the Broken Mirror

NEW novelet à la Black Mask—

ED LACY's *The Juicy Mango Caper*

NEW short stories—

LAWRENCE TREAT's *A As in Alibi*

ANTHONY GILBERT's *Sleep Is the Enemy*

EDWARD D. HOCH's *The Odor of Melting*

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magazine BOX SCORE for 1964

In editing his third volume of the BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR (published in July 1965 by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.) Anthony Boucher selected 16 stories, of which 14 appeared in magazines (and of these 14 best, 6 were chosen from *EQMM*). Mr. Boucher's Honor Roll listed 113 stories from magazines and 8 stories from books. Here is the box score for the 113 best detective-crime-mystery stories published in all American magazines during 1964:

name of magazine	*Honor Roll stories*	*percentage*
Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine	50	44.1%
Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine	13	11.5%
Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine	11	9.7%
The Saint Mystery Magazine	11	9.7%
Playboy	6	5.3%
Saturday Evening Post	4	3.5%
Cosmopolitan	3	2.7%
New Yorker	3	2.7%
Argosy	2	1.8%
McCall's	2	1.8%
This Week	2	1.8%
Atlantic	1	.9%
Baker Street Journal	1	.9%
Cavalier	1	.9%
Chase	1	.9%
Horror	1	.9%
Ladies' Home Journal	1	.9%

The percentages above indicate that *EQMM* published nearly 4 times as many distinguished new mystery stories as our nearest competitor, and nearly 1½ times as many as our 3 nearest competitors put together—and *EQMM's* 50 Honor Roll stories in 1964 did not include the superior reprints, both short stories and short novels, which *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* offers throughout the year.

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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

Fact-crime is largely a man's domain; but the rare and wise women who have written in this field often achieve a subtle penetrating insight that the best male writers may envy. EQMM readers know Miriam Allen deFord for her always striking fictions of crime; now at last her even more notable fact-crime essays are collected as MURDERERS SANE & MAD (Abelard-Schuman, $5). These 13 "case histories in the motivation and rationale of murder," ranging from obscure cases to freshly examined classics, are a lasting addition to the definitive fact-crime shelf.

For further evidence of female insight, see Carolyn Anspacher's THE TRIAL OF DR. DE KAPLANY (Fell, $5), a powerful account of one of the century's most terrible and meaningful murders by a newswoman who covered the trial, and F. Tennyson Jesse's immortal MURDER AND ITS MOTIVES (1924; expanded 1952), now available in paperback (Dolphin C386, 95¢).

★★★★ **THE EXPENDABLE SPY, *by Jack Hunter*** Dutton, $4.95)

Vigor, intricacy and credibility (in its treatment both of espionage and of the German people at the end of World War II) mark the best spy-adventure novel of the fall season.

★★★★ **AIRS ABOVE THE GROUND, *by Mary Stewart*** (Mill-Morrow, $4.95)

Espionage, a traveling circus, two superb chases, and Austria's great Lippizaner horses, all blended with romance and humor by the incomparable mixmistress—whose delightful THIS ROUGH MAGIC (1964) has now been reprinted (Crest t837, 75¢).

★★★★ **THE STRODE VENTURER, *by Hammond Innes*** (Knopf, $4.95)

Grand adventure story, possibly Innes' best, dexterously counterpoising the beauty and terror of peril in ocean wastes with the devious maneuvers of London financiers, and making both worlds absorbing.

★★★★ **BEFORE THE BALL WAS OVER, *by Alexandra Roudybush*** (Crime Club, $3.50)

Witty satiric novel on Washington society and its reigning hostesses, interweaving an astonishing number of plots (many of them criminous) with virtuoso economy.

(*Continued on page 56*)

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(Continued from page 55)

★★★ **WAITING FOR A TIGER, by Ben Healey** (Harper & Row, $3.95)

Blithe fresh lively pursuit-thriller with amusing love story and colorful Riviera setting.

★★★ **THE LAST KNOWN ADDRESS, by Joseph Harrington** (Lippincott, $3.50)

Highly skilled successful endeavor to maintain interest for 60,000 words on nothing but the hour-by-hour slogging of a police search for a missing witness. No murder, no violence—and wholly suspenseful.

★★★ **TO BORROW TROUBLE, by Miriam Borgenicht** (Crime Club, $3.50)

To save a baby from kidnaping, a troubled teen-ager kidnaps it herself. Warmly human melodrama, for Charlotte Armstrong fans.

★★★ **THE FOURTH SIDE OF THE TRIANGLE, by Ellery Queen** (Random, $3.95)

E. Q. armchairs a murder case that comes to trial three times. Not always credible as a novel, but very prettily constructed.

★★★ **DOLL, by Ed McBain** (Delacorte, $3.50)

The 87th Precinct have an extra motive for solving murder: to save their own Steve Carella, who has fallen into the killer's hands. Usual fine McBain readability, and an extra-good gimmick hinted by the title.

★★★ **WHEN LONDON WALKED IN TERROR, by Tom A. Cullen** (Houghton Mifflin $4.95)

The life and times (non-fiction) of Jack the Ripper—poorly written and edited but admirably researched, with important new material.

Anthologies: The annual Mystery Writers of America collection, MASTERS OF MAYHEM, edited by Edward D. Radin (Morrow, $3.95), is a disappointment: some good stories, of course (by deFord, Robert L. Fish, De Forbes, etc.), but too many substandard trivia. . . . ELLERY QUEEN'S 1966 ANTHOLOGY (Davis, $1.25) is as rich a treasurechest as one has come to expect: 19 entries ranging from good to grand, including a fine long novella by the late Roy Vickers.

Hardcover reprints: Agatha Christie's MURDER INTERNATIONAL (Dodd, Mead, $4.95) offers one of Christie's all-time bests, her meticulous recreation of ancient Egypt in DEATH COMES AS THE END (1944), plus the intrigue-thriller SO MANY STEPS TO DEATH (1955) and the Hercule Poirot puzzle EVIL UNDER THE SUN (1941). (And for a superlative Poirot parody, see the story by Tage La Cour in the Queen anthology above.) . . . Arthur W. Upfield's THE DEVIL'S STEPS (1946; London House & Maxwell, $4.50) reveals Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte as a different kind of secret agent in World War II.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 290th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a "first story" with a chuckling plot situation which involves police, lawyers, threats of arrest, counterthreats—and yet there is an interesting question: Was any crime committed at all?

The author, Robert T. Owens, is in his mid-thirties. He has spent "a number of years" in writing and rewriting two long serious novels, one based on his experiences as Purser on the S.S. United States and other ships, the other about Dallas, the city in which he was born and raised; he has also written two short mystery novels—parodies of "tough guy" detective novels; but EQMM's purchase of "With Perpetual Care" is his first fiction sale . . . We hope to bring you more of Mr. Owens' ironically amusing stories.

WITH PERPETUAL CARE

by ROBERT T. OWENS

THEY MIGHT NEVER HAVE KNOWN he was there except that an old man's bladder often will not see him through the night. He had opened the vault and was halfway out of it on his way to the Men's Room at the end of the Marble Hall of Memories when the guard happened to pass by on his four A.M. round.

In answer to the alarm the police found the guard running wildly from the Mausoleum across the immaculate lawn of the cemetery toward the city street; the guard was almost incoherent with fright.

It was not until the guard was safely inside the squad car that he finally blurted out, "They're resurecting the dead in there!"

It was almost an hour later, after a search of the Mausoleum produced nothing out of order, that the exasperated policemen demanded that the terrified guard show them just what had happened and where.

After a strong pull on a hidden bottle, the guard led the police into the stately passageway of white marble and pointed a shaking finger at the third crypt from the bottom, in the second tier of tombs, to which was affixed a bronze plaque bearing the name *Clarence Abbott.* There were no birth and death dates as there were on the other crypts; just the name.

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Grabbing the ornate handle at the bottom of the plaque, one of the police officers lifted the door which rolled upward on its steel rollers. The open door revealed neither a bronze nor a silver casket, nor a cement-walled emptiness, but what appeared to be the body of an old man with a sallow, wrinkled face, bluish lips, and long yellow-tinged white hair.

The body seemed to shift slightly, the head turned, and the mouth spoke.

"What do you want?"

The nervous police officer pulled out his gun as he stammered, "Who are you?"

"Clarence Abbott."

"Are you—dead?"

"In a way, I guess I am."

"I mean, what are you doing in there?"

"Trying to sleep."

"Get out of there!"

"Why should I? This is my crypt —I own it."

"Well, I don't know why. Only you can't be in there unless you're dead. Yes, that's why."

"And if I am dead?"

"I don't care whether you're dead or alive. You're going to get out of there and come down and explain this to the Sergeant."

"I don't think what you're doing is legal, officer," the old man sighed wearily. "However, if you'll point that gun in another direction I'll come with you."

The still-nervous policeman sheepishly holstered his gun, and Mr. Clarence Abbott eased himself clumsily out of the crypt. He reached back in for a battered Panama hat, carefully closed the oven-like vault door, then with dignity he walked with the police out to their squad car.

It was after 9:30 the next morning before anyone discussed the situation with Clarence Abbott himself. All night long he had sat on the hard wooden bench in the precinct station. Mr. Abbott's threat of a suit for false arrest, backed up by the fact that he produced a Bill of Sale for Crypt Number 4711, plus $57 in cash, made the police hesitate to charge the old man either with trespassing or vagrancy.

Now he was taken to the office of a young Assistant District Attorney who treated him in a businesslike way.

"There'll be no charges filed against you, Mr. Abbott. Now then, while it's true you own Crypt Number 4711, I've talked to Mr. Roger Stick, Jr., the president and owner of the Mausoleum, and he says that if you try to sleep in your crypt again he'll have you prosecuted."

"What for?"

"Trespassing."

"Nonsense," said Mr. Abbott. "How can I be trespassing? Read their brochure." He detached a yellowed folder from his Bill of Sale and began to read. "'The Mausole-

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um is open to the public twenty-four hours a day. Mausoleum families know they can visit their loved ones at any time regardless of weather, assured that the building will always be light and comfortable. A drawing room is provided for families to meet, or to sit alone and read, or simply to be comfortable while they meditate or pray. Soft music is continuously piped into all public rooms.' Now, how can I possibly be arrested for trespassing?"

"Breaking and entering, then."

"My own crypt? The very first line of the sales contract says, 'You have purchased a space for eternity, with perpetual care.'" Mr. Abbott smiled. "I remember the first time I read that some forty years ago. It gave me quite a laugh. You see, the contractor who built the Mausoleum was well known for thinning his mortar to the point where many of his structures didn't last even a decade, much less an eternity."

The Assistant District Attorney moved uneasily in his chair.

"You intend to continue to sleep in the Mausoleum?"

"Absolutely."

"I've already called Legal Aid, Mr. Abbott. I suggest that you get in touch with Mr. Tom Roper, of Roper and Roper, who will be glad to give you legal advice in this matter."

"No. I . . ." Mr. Abbott hesitated "I don't think I'll go to him."

"Mr. Roper is a young attorney, Mr. Abbott, but I can assure you that Roper and Roper is one of the oldest and most respected law firms in the city."

"Yes. Yes, I know." Again he hesitated. "I'm afraid he'd be too expensive."

"Every attorney in the city takes his turn on Legal Aid. There'll be no charge for Tom Roper's services."

"Well, I don't know—"

"Mr. Abbott," the Assistant District Attorney interrupted, "if you insist on occupying your tomb before you're dead, believe me when I tell you this: you *need* legal advice."

"How long have you been sleeping in your crypt, Mr. Abbott?" Tom Roper III asked the old man.

"Almost a year now."

"Why do you do it? You say you have an income."

"I have an oil royalty that pays me $57 a month, sometimes less, according to the oil production for the month."

"How did this all begin? What gave you the idea?"

"I attended the funeral of George McGinnis."

"The banker?"

"Yes, the banker. Poor George. Spent all his life making money instead of friends. He was the last of my crowd. I'd come out from town on the bus. Then there was the long walk from the street up to the Mausoleum. It was hot and I

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was tired. The Mausoleum was air-conditioned and after the services I decided to stay and watch old George get entombed. Someone should have, you know, and all the people who were there had come for business reasons rather than love or friendship or even remembrance. And George was the last of my crowd. The next to last—I suppose I'm the last.

"They opened the crypt door and slid his casket in, and when the masons began to cement the white marble door permanently in place, I felt I'd done my duty by George. I began to walk down the marble corridor looking at the names on the crypts. I knew almost everyone buried there—most of them had been members of my crowd. Then I found myself standing in front of my own crypt. In all the years I've owned it, I'd never seen it. Funny, when I read the name Clarence Abbott, I wondered how long he had been dead.

"As I say, I was tired. There was the long walk down to the gate, then a hot crowded bus ride back to my second-rate—no, third-rate hotel room. I felt very weak. I thought maybe I might die, and I wanted to lie down without causing a lot of trouble.

"My crypt door opened easily and I just climbed inside. When I awoke the next morning I thought perhaps I was dead. But I wasn't. I'd simply had the first good night's sleep I'd had in months."

"How can you breathe in there?" Tom Roper asked, slowly shaking his head in disbelief.

"Why, read the brochure." Mr. Abbott quoted from it: "'Each crypt is ventilated with a continuous flow of fresh air, conditioned to remove moisture and extend preservation.' It's most comfortable."

"And you've slept there ever since?"

"I went back to my hotel but the sight of my dingy room depressed me. I went down to the dirty lobby with all the other old men and they, as always, depressed me even more. It was a third-rate hotel full of third-rate old men. I liked neither. I put on my dark suit, the one I'd worn to George's funeral, and went back to the Mausoleum.

"This was my crowd. Even dead, they were still first-rate. For the first time in years, lying in my crypt, I felt at home."

Mr. Abbott noticed the inadvertent smile on the face of the young lawyer.

"You think I'm a snob, don't you? You're right. I am. It's the reason I bought the crypt in the first place.

"The Mausoleum was built just as the city was booming with new oil wealth. The old families who still had their money and the new rich—they all bought crypts in the Mausoleum. It was a sort of status symbol of its day, like owning a Pierce Arrow.

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"I was a young broker at the time, and to tell you the truth some people called me a social climber. My mother was old family, but she had married beneath her and this put me on the borderline of social acceptability.

"Come to think of it, having bought that crypt was what actually established me. Old lady McGinnis, George's mother, was the belle dame of society here in her day. One night at a party she came over to me and said, 'Mr. Abbott, you're right between Maude Spriggins and cousin Lydia Mudgen.' I must confess I didn't know what the old girl meant until she added, 'You'll spend eternity between two of the most devout Christian ladies.'

"Because of the position allocated to me in eternity, rather than my social position of the time, Mrs. McGinnis sat me beside her oldest daughter at the next dinner party. From then on there was never any question of my social position."

Now there was no question of the smile on the face of Tom Roper III.

"Did you really purchase the crypt just to get into society?"

"Of course not. I bought it because I'd just made a modest killing in the market and Roger Stick, the promoter of the Mausoleum, was desperate for cash at the time."

"Are you referring to Roger Stick, Junior?"

"No, his father—not that pudgy-faced son of his. If old Roger were alive, there wouldn't be any of this to-do about my sleeping in my own crypt. I think he'd rather enjoy it.

"Roger was sort of like me—a poor boy, not quite accepted. He was a real promoter—sort of forerunner of present day used-car salesmen. Dashing, handsome, wore a British type mustache, and all the women adored him. He was always promoting something just a little on the shady side.

"I recall years ago that George McGinnis said, 'The trouble with Roger Stick is he was born on the wrong side of the tracks. If he had been born in the slums instead of into middle-class respectability he'd probably be as successful as Al Capone. He's a con man at heart who just didn't have a real chance to develop.' It's the only funny remark I ever heard George McGinnis make.

"Who would have thought that Roger Stick would leave a fortune to that pompous little son of his, made out of a mausoleum of all things, while I, a good conservative broker, got wiped out in the crash holding over five thousand shares of common stocks bought on margin?

"You know, thinking of old Mrs. McGinnis, it may have been she who gave me the idea for moving into my own crypt. For years she used to go out to the Mausoleum at all times of the day or night to sit by the crypt of her youngest son, Teddy. George inherited the brains

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in the family, and Teddy the looks. He died when he was only thirty-three, you know, and she never really got over it."

Mr. Abbott shook his head sadly. "Life can be so deceiving. Teddy was a woman chaser and died of acute alcoholism."

"If you went broke in the crash, how have you managed to live all these years, Mr. Abbott?" the lawyer asked.

"I had once bought a small piece of a wildcat oil syndicate—something that as a broker I'd always advised my clients not to do. 'You want to invest your money,' I'd tell them, 'not gamble with it.' The wells came in and every acre paid off. For ten or twelve years after the stock crash I lived rather well on the income from my share of the royalties. I had a suite at the Athletic Club and played poker occasionally with some of the old crowd who were left.

"Then the oil wells began to peter out and finally my income tumbled to what it is today. I had to give up my membership at the Athletic Club and take successively cheaper rooms in successively cheaper hotels."

"You have no family, sir?"

Mr. Abbott sat without speaking, as if he had not heard the question.

"I have no family," he said at last.

"I would have thought that a man-about-town like you would have been quite a catch." Tom Roper smiled gently.

Clarence Abbott's watery blue eyes searched the young man's face and then returned the smile a bit sadly.

"Perhaps I was. Only I made the mistake of falling in love with a girl whose mother had higher social aspirations for her daughter than a rising young bond salesman."

The gentle smile of Tom Roper III softened into a smile of sympathy.

"You must have known my mother and father, Mr. Abbott."

"Yes. Yes, I knew them."

"Didn't you ever go to any of your friends for help? Like George McGinnis, for instance?"

"Oh, my, no." Mr. Abbott clucked. "If there's anything a banker hates worse than making an unsecured loan, it's making a personal loan. The truth is, I doubt if George ever knew I was broke. I used to save my money and about once a year I'd ask George to lunch at the best restaurant in town. I doubt if he knew that it took me nearly a month's royalty check to pay the bill. I even stopped that some ten years ago. All we had to talk about were the old times, and George was one of the few people who was able to switch over from the old crowd based on family position to the new crowd based on money. In the end we had nothing in common but our burial ground.

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"In a broader sense, perhaps that's all any two men ever have in common; but philosophy was never my strong suit. As I told you, I'm a snob. But, you see, my crowd were the last remnants of the Victorian Age when God was in Heaven and people still thought in terms of permanence, of families, and even of gentility. A society based on family and honor and traditions may have had its smug weaknesses, but it was infinitely superior to a society based only on money."

"Mr. Abbott," Tom Roper said as he rose from his desk, "I'm going out to make a personal telephone call. I've never considered Roger Stick, Junior, a close friend, although I've known him all my life. I'm inclined to agree with you that he's a pompous ass. The rest of us think of Roger only as a mortician, but Roger thinks of himself as the Keeper of the Flame. But a telephone call just may settle this whole matter."

Left alone, the old man looked around the office which was dominated by pictures of the original Roper and Roper—bearded grandfather and smooth-shaven father, both with high foreheads, piercing eyes, and firm chins. A casual observer may have thought Tom Roper III resembled his two ancestors, but Mr. Abbott knew better. It was his mother whom the present Tom Roper had taken after.

"Mr. Abbott," the lawyer said when he re-entered the room. "I've got good news for you. Roger Stick has agreed to buy the crypt back from you at four times the price you paid for it."

"I don't think I'll sell, thank you."

"It would be enough money for you to live in dignity again."

"For how many years?"

"You could invest it."

"Even at six per cent I'd still be living in third-class hotel rooms."

"But, sir, isn't it depressing to spend all your time in a cemetery?"

"How could it be depressing? All my friends are there. I get up in the morning and walk on the soft grass and have breakfast at the drug store. I read my morning paper in the sunshine on a carved stone bench in landscaped gardens. When the weather's bad, I sit in one of the formal drawing rooms of the Mausoleum and listen to the soft music. Sometimes in the evening I stand beside a crypt and talk with an old friend."

"Okay, Mr. Abbott, only it'll be a tough fight."

"I own the crypt. In perpetuity. There's nothing in this sales contract that says I must be dead to occupy it. Is there?"

"No-o-o."

"Then how can they legally keep me out?"

"By claiming that a mausoleum is meant for the dead, and that so obvious a fact doesn't have to be stated in the sales contract."

"And when is a man dead?"

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"When?"

"When is a man legally dead?"

"When his heart stops beating, when he ceases to breathe."

"That's the medical definition. What's the legal one?"

"Well . . ."

"If I choose the dead over the living, who's to say I'm not dead?"

"Well . . ."

"Will you still represent me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do we have a chance to win?" Mr. Abbott asked calmly.

"The chance that you may be right—that the crypt is yours to occupy whenever you choose to consider yourself dead."

This time, when the young lawyer left his office, Mr. Abbott gently picked up the telephone on his desk and found himself listening to the angry voice of Roger Stick.

"I won't even discuss it. If that crazy old man tries to sleep here again tonight, I'll have him arrested!"

"Not without a court order, you won't."

"My attorneys say they can get a court order."

"Roger, listen to me. Mr. Abbott was a friend of your father's. He helped your father when—"

"Don't mention my father's name with the likes of him. The Mausoleum is a monument to my father's purity of thought and vision. I'll not have the place desecrated by a dirty old man trying to make a mockery of the place. What if the newspapers get hold of this?"

"They won't unless you take it to court. Ask for a court order to restrain an old man from sleeping in his own grave, and not only the local papers, but every newspaper in the country will pick the story up."

"What do you suggest I do?" The voice of Roger Stick shook with fury.

"Leave the old man alone. If he wants to sleep in his own crypt, let him. Who else will know about it except you and me?"

"He'll sleep in his crypt only when he's dead and not before!" The voice was now an angry threat.

"You'd better take my advice, Roger, or you'll end up a laughingstock."

"If he comes back here tonight he'll sleep in jail!"

"Have Mr. Abbott arrested without a court order and I'll sue you for false arrest. I mean that, Roger."

"You blackmailer! Your own mother and father are buried in the very same corridor. You'd let their hallowed resting place become a mockery just for a measly legal fee?"

"There is no legal fee."

"Then why are you representing the likes of him?"

"Because he may be legally within his rights. And if you want to know, because I like the old man."

"I give you warning, Tom Roper. Don't let that old man come back

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here!"—and the telephone banged up.

"You'd better be in my office tomorrow morning at nine," Tom Roper told his client. "Why don't you let me put you up in a decent hotel tonight until we get this thing settled?"

"Thank you, no," Mr. Abbott said. "But I appreciate your offer. I appreciate all you're doing for me."

"It's an honor, sir," the young lawyer said as he escorted the old man out into the hallway of the building.

"I can tell you something now," Mr. Abbott said. "I couldn't before, because I wanted you to accept my case on its merit."

Tom Roper III looked quizzically at the old man.

"Your mother was a great one for keeping scrapbooks. Did you perhaps keep them after her death?"

"They're at home in the attic, sir."

"If you'll look at the picture of your mother taken on the night she made her debut, you'll see that the man on whose arm she was presented to society was mine."

"Seriously, sir?"

"That night, your mother was the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. You resemble her, young man. Same eyes, same gentle mouth."

"Mr. Abbott, come stay at my house tonight. I'd like you to meet her grandson."

"No. No, I couldn't. I've seen too much of the living. It would be too much." Mr. Abbott stumbled against the wall of the corridor.

"Are you all right?"

"Tired is all—just tired. I think I'll take a taxi."

No one tried to stop Clarence Abbott as he made his way to the Marble Hall of Memories. No one saw him as he stopped in front of the crypt of Mary Roper—Faithful Wife of Tom Roper II. No one saw him cover the name Mary with his hand as he said, "Mary. Mary. I saw our son today."

The court never had to hand down a ruling on the restraining order. Clarence Abbott died that night in his own crypt.

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QUEEN's QUIZ:

Of Spelling and Nomenclature

1. How do you spell the first name of the creator of Charlie Chan?
2. How do you spell the first name of the creator of Perry Mason?

3. How do you spell the middle name of the Father of the Detective Story?
4. How do you spell the middle name of the Mother of the Detective Story?

5. How do you spell the last name of the creator of Colonel Anthony Gethryn?
6. How do you spell the last name of the creator of Lew Archer?

7. What do the names of (O. Henry's) Tictocq and (Robert Barr's) Eugène Valmont have in common?

8. What are the surnames of three famous detective-story writers whose first name was Arthur?

9. Can you name three famous "Kings" of mystery? (Beware—a trick question!)

(*Answers on page 85*)

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 291st "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . an especially "detailed" story for a "first," with more than the usual number of characters (clearly and cleanly delineated) and more than the usual number of plot elements (clearly and cleanly integrated) normally found in a detective story by a beginner in the field; and the detective is most appealing too—the neighborhood druggist who knows so much about the families he serves . . .

The author, Libby MacCall, is a graduate of Radcliffe College ("never mind the date!" she says). She wrote publicity for women's accounts (food and fashions) in a large New York advertising agency, then retired to raise a family of two daughters; her husband is the editor of an engineering magazine. While the daughters were growing up, Mrs. MacCall led the typical suburban life of a homemaker, wife, and mother—active in local causes and church affairs, Girl Scouts leader, League of Women Voters, etc.; and by no means less important, and in some ways more interesting, she found time to teach "charm courses." Now she is working full time at writing—so we have every expectation of publishing more of Mrs. MacCall's stories . . .

RECIPE FOR MURDER

by LIBBY MacCALL

AT ELEVEN MINUTES TO NINE NICHolas Notopolis (Reg. Pharmacist) approached the door of Briarcliff Gardens Drug Store. He whistled, with more enthusiasm than accuracy, as he groped through his pocket for the key. Having located it, he contrived to insert it in the lock and turn it—which was quite a feat, considering that on his right arm he was balancing a tall stack of cake tins, complete with cake.

Once inside, Mr. Notopolis deposited his precarious burden on the counter, straightened his chubby shoulders with a relieved shrug, and set about preparing his establishment for the day's business. He started several coffee-makers going, wiped the spotless counter, and cut one panful of cake into squares, which he arranged carefully under a glass cover. He stored the remaining pans of cake under the counter

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and bustled into the back room to change into his pharmacist's white coat. It was now exactly nine o'clock.

At 9:05 the first customer of the day walked in. Mrs. Pagano seated herself at the counter, a vast woman in a shapeless garment strewn with pink flowers. Her bulky outlines completely obscured the small round stool.

Mr. Notopolis set a cup and saucer before her. A delicious aroma arose as he went through the ritual of pouring the day's first cup of coffee. It almost always went to Mrs. Pagano, whose children were invariably the first ones delivered at the supervised playground run by the management of Briarcliff Gardens. Having deposited their offspring in the sandbox, other mothers then headed for the drugstore across the street—for their morning half hour of refreshment and gossip.

The store was the center of life in the large housing development. It was only natural that its proprietor should know whose offspring were ailing. But the roster of patients was only the beginning of the tubby little pharmacist's stock of knowledge. There were those who claimed that the inside of his brain must resemble a giant computer, with a neatly punched card for each resident. "He knows more about us than we do about ourselves," the mothers said. But they continued to gossip at his counter, supplying him with all the latest tidbits. Mrs. Pagano was one of his most faithful clients and most reliable sources of information.

"Here's the saccharine." Mr. Notopolis pushed the small container a little closer to her. "Cheese cake?"

"Golly, I shouldn't. The doctor gave me the devil last time. Two months to go and already I've gained twenty pounds. Well . . . just a small piece. Oh! Morning, Miss Rivera."

Mr. Notopolis turned with a welcoming smile and a cup of coffee to the dark young woman who hurried in and seated herself with quick, intense movements.

"Thanks, Mr. N., you're a lifesaver. Make it two pieces of cheese cake, please. I need them."

Maria Rivera, painfully thin in her crumpled white nurse's uniform, sipped the hot coffee and watched hungrily as a double portion of cake was transferred to a plate.

"Boy, I don't know how you stay so thin." Mrs. Pagano eyed the two pieces of cake enviously.

"It's this night duty. It's got me worn to a frazzle. Soon's I eat, I'm going home to hit the hay. Hope I sleep today. Yesterday it was so noisy I could hardly shut my eyes. That's what I get for having an apartment next door to the office. What a commotion!"

"That was me and my Mario," said Mrs. Pagano. "Sorry. I forgot that you sleep in the daytime. We

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were so mad at that manager that we yelled at her and she hollered right back."

"What did Miss Carpenter do this time?"

"Called the cops on us. Would you believe it? She said my Mario was running a gambling game! All he did was have a few of his pals in to play pinochle and drink a little wine. She told the cops she heard that Mario was a member of Cosa Nostra. Wouldn't that get you mad?"

"I'll say. That woman! She's the limit. Runs the place like it was a girls' boarding school and she was the head mistress."

"She gets away with it because she can't be fired," Mr. Notopolis said.

They all knew that Briarcliff Gardens had been built by an unconventional philanthropist for the benefit of white-collar workers. Miss Ethel Carpenter, daughter of an old family servant, had been named in the will as Manager for as long as she cared to keep the position. She summoned people to her office to be reprimanded for letting their children drop candy wrappers in the scrupulously neat garden, or refused tenants a larger apartment because the size of the family didn't warrant it, even though they'd been on the waiting list longer than the lucky winner. All the residents complained, but few moved away. The rents were deliciously low.

"She does keep things nice, I'll admit that—but she's so bossy and bad-tempered."

Miss Rivera's flow of eloquence was interrupted by the hasty entrance of an attractively dressed young woman, her eyes shining with excitement.

"Guess what!" she cried. "You'll just never believe it. Miss Carpenter's dead!"

Maria choked on her coffee. Mr. Notopolis and Mrs. Pagano uttered loud exclamations of amazement. Pleased with the sensation she had created, Amy Wagner selected a stool, ordered coffee and cheese cake, and began to relate the details of her news.

"Steve Schmidlapp brought her morning paper, like he does every day. When she didn't answer the doorbell he figured something must be wrong. So he let himself in with his passkey and there she lay—" she paused dramatically—"dead in her bed!"

"Funny," said the nurse. "She never looked like a heart case to me."

"She never bought any drugs," Mr. Notopolis contributed. "I only sold her things like lipstick and toothpaste. And such a young woman!"

"Thirty-five if she was a day," said Maria Rivera.

"That's young!" said Mr. Notopolis. "My, it's hard to believe she's dead. Terrible!"

"Hard to believe, yes. Terrible?"

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Miss Rivera laughed harshly. "I doubt you'll get many people around here to agree on that."

"How did you find out?" Mr. Notopolis asked Amy Wagner.

"Steve came banging on our door, shouting for Bill. Poor Bill had to run over in his bathrobe. He wasn't even up yet. He had a hangover and was planning to be late for work this morning. Being Assistant Manager to Miss Carpenter is—was—no fun. He got all the dirty work."

"Maybe now he'll be Manager?" Mrs. Pagano said. "Such a nice guy, your Bill. Not like Miss Carpenter."

"Now, now, Mrs. Pagano. Don't speak ill of the dead," said Mr. Notopolis gently.

"She was mean when she was alive and that's the way we'll remember her now she's gone." Mrs. Pagano finished her half portion of cake and held out the empty plate. "I'll take another piece after all. To celebrate." She held up her coffee cup and proposed a toast. "To Bill Wagner, new Manager of Briarcliff Gardens!"

Amy smiled. "I'll join you in that toast, but it may be premature. The Directors of the Trust Fund will have to meet and make the appointment. Bill does seem the logical person. After five years here, he knows more about this place than anybody except Steve Schmidlapp—and you, of course, Mr. Notopolis. Steve's a great handyman, but they'd certainly never consider him for Manager."

"Once he gets over the shock of finding her body, I bet Steve will be happier than any of us," said Amy Wagner. "Miss Carpenter was always riding that poor old man. The idea of making him bring her paper every morning! He has enough to do, with all the work around this place, not to mention taking care of his invalid sister. But he was so scared she'd fire him, he never dared say no to her."

"Omigosh! Steve's sister! I never gave Kirsten a thought!" gasped Maria. "With that heart of hers—why, a sudden shock could be fatal." Maria put some change on the counter and got down off her stool. "I'd better check her pulse and blood pressure. She could probably do with a sedative. See you later."

"Maria certainly is devoted to Kirsten Schmidlapp. I don't know how they'd manage without her," said Mr. Notopolis.

"It must be awful to be tied to a wheel chair like she is." Mrs. Pagano gave a gusty sigh to denote sympathy. "And such a lovely woman. At least, she's got Steve. Never saw a brother and sister get along so good. Almost like they was married, they are."

"Better," said Amy. "Don't tell me you never fight with your Mario! I'm willing to admit that Bill and I have our disagreements—plenty of them."

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"Sure we fight. Half the fun's making up again." Mrs. Pagano climbed down laboriously and made her ponderous way to the door. "Well, if they *do* make Bill the Manager, you work on him to give us a bigger apartment, okay?"

When Mrs. Pagano had disappeared, Amy held out her cup for a refill. "I bet Miss Carpenter's death is a big relief to the Paganos," she said. "They were too low-class for this place, she thought. That's why she wouldn't let them have a bigger flat. He is kind of on the tough side, but they're nice. We have the best neighbors of any tenant in Briarcliff, now that Miss Carpenter's gone. Mrs. Pagano's always glad to mind the baby. And Maria Rivera's a great gal. She's another one who won't cry over Miss Carpenter. That good-looking doctor she's been chasing—you know, the one in C Eight?—he used to be Miss Carpenter's steady. I guess he must like variety—Maria's so dark and skinny, and Miss Carpenter's hair may have come out of a bottle, but her figure was for real."

"Now really, Mrs. Wagner—the lady is dead!" exclaimed the little druggist.

"Okay, Mr. N. I didn't mean to scandalize you. Let's change the subject. Now there's nobody else around, how about breaking down and giving me the recipe for this wonderful Greek cheese cake of yours? I promise I won't tell a soul."

Mr. Notopolis laughed merrily. "The recipe for Yaurtoepita? You must think I'm crazy! If you make it at home, then you won't come in here to buy it. Anyway, I don't know how to bake a cake. All I can make is cough medicines and tonics—that's my kind of cooking. Mrs. Notopolis bakes while I'm here at the store. She learned from her mother, and *she* learned from *her* mother—only a Greek can do it. You forget about the recipe. Keep coming in here for your cheese cake."

"Just tell me one thing: does she use cottage cheese or cream cheese?"

Mr. Notopolis smiled, shrugged, and said nothing.

"Okay, Old Meanie! But you may as well know, we girls have a bet on. We're all trying different cheese-cake recipes. Whoever figures it out first; gets a prize."

Mr. Notopolis laughed confidently. "Good luck to you," he said.

The door banged open to admit a good-looking young man, wearing an anguished expression. He eased himself gently onto a stool and moaned, "Bromo and a cuppa coffee, Nick, please. Golly, what a head I've got!"

"Why, Bill, honey." Amy slipped her arm around his neck.

"Hey, watch it! Don't jolt me!"

"Sorry, dear. Have you been having an awful time?"

"Just a lot of routine questions from the police. But on an empty

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stomach and with a hangover—hurry up, will you, Nick."

"This saves me going to the office to look for you. I need a little extra money, dear. There's a sale of cashmere sweaters at Swenson's."

Bill groaned again. "Please, Amy, not now. My head's killing me. Besides, I'm broke."

Amy sighed, dropped a gentle kiss on the top of her husband's head, waved to the pharmacist, and departed.

"There you are, Bill. Drink up."

Bill Wagner gulped it down, made a face, and then drank the black coffee as a chaser.

"You know something, Nick? That dame is gonna make more trouble dead than she did when she was alive. Cops talked to her doctor. No heart disease—perfect health—gotta have an autopsy! Well, thanks for the pick-me-up. I'd better get back to the office."

All morning Mr. Notopolis' establishment was busy. Everybody had developed a sudden need for baby powder, bobby pins, or anything else that would serve as an excuse to come into the drug store. So much coffee and cheese cake were consumed that a new record was set. Tongues clacked, but nothing further could be learned.

Next morning, however, when Mr. Notopolis staggered down the street with his stack of cake pans, he found a policeman leaning against the front door.

"What can I do for you?" asked the fat little druggist pleasantly.

"Keep the place locked up for a few minutes, and answer some questions. And I'll have a cup of coffee and a piece of your famous cheese cake. I've been asking around. I get the message that you know more than anybody else about what goes on here."

Mr. Notopolis offered a modest disclaimer.

"Okay. Never mind the inside information. Just tell me where you were Monday night, say from eight to midnight?"

"Why do you ask?"

"We just got the autopsy results on this Ethel Carpenter. She didn't die a natural death. So we have to check up on everybody."

"On all five hundred families in Briarcliff Gardens?"

"Hope not. For a starter, just on you and the folks in Entry W, where she lived. Night watchman says he saw no strangers."

"But why me? I don't live in W."

"You have the easiest access to drugs. And other reasons. Suppose you just tell me where you were Monday night."

"Well, I close up here at ten. But Monday I stayed late, taking inventory."

"No witness to that, huh?"

"No, no witness."

"Next question: they tell me this cheese cake of yours is something extra-special. You won't give any-

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body the recipe and you won't sell it to take out. Right?"

"Yes. It's my specialty—Greek cheese cake, called Yaurtoepita."

"Mr. Notopolis, I'm afraid you're in trouble. Miss Carpenter had company in her apartment Monday night. We found two plates on her kitchen table, with the remains of cheese cake on 'em. Now, if you don't sell it to take out—well, then, you must be the one who took it over there. Our pathologist says it was something in the cheese cake that killed her. He's still analyzing it."

"I can account for all my drugs. My records are one hundred per cent perfect. Anyway, there's lots of other kinds of cheese cake."

"We happen to know that somebody walked past this store at eleven and there was no light on. Your wife says you got home at one. If you weren't with Miss Carpenter, then where were you? You can't take inventory in the dark."

Mr. Notopolis blushed. "My wife doesn't like it if I don't come straight home when I close up. But sometimes I like to play a little poker. So Monday night I was over at my friend's for a little game. My wife will be awful mad if she finds out."

"Well, there goes my best suspect. Give me the names of your poker players, and I'll check out your story."

Mr. Notopolis watched sadly as the detective departed. He might at least have paid for his cheese cake.

That evening the detective returned.

"Five guys agree you were playing poker. But we still have to check your drug records. Autopsy showed multiple small hemorrhages into the intestinal tract. And that cake was loaded with Dicumarol. Let's have a look at your books."

Mr. Notopolis brought out his drug ledger. Efficiently he accounted for every tablet of Dicumarol he had purchased during the year. So many to this customer, so many to that one, so many remaining in stock on the shelf.

"You see," he said. "I have many customers on Dicumarol. It's a very widely used drug today."

"You can say that again. Well, okay, so it wasn't you."

After the detective had gone, Mr. Notopolis fidgeted around the store. As usual during the dinner hour it was empty. Finally he dropped a dime in the public telephone and dialed his home.

"Hello, Mamma? You got some more Yaurtoepita made? I could use it for this evening. So many extra people coming in. Why don't you bring it down to me?"

It would have been simple enough to tell people he'd run out. But he just couldn't wait till he talked everything over with his wife. She appeared shortly, bearing three pans of the famous cake. They

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settled themselves comfortably at the counter and began making inroads into two of the juiciest banana splits the fat little druggist had ever concocted. He brought her up to date—but he carefully omitted any mention of the poker game.

"What do they use Di—Di—what you said, for?"

"Dicumarol. It's a blood thinner. Doctors give it to people who've had heart attacks, so their blood won't clot. Clots can cause another attack. But in a healthy person a big dose of Dicumarol makes the blood so thin it seeps right through the walls of the capillaries. In other words, Miss Carpenter bled to death. Now, who could have baked a cake that looked like our cheese cake and given it to Miss Carpenter?"

Mamma gave a helpless gesture. "Nobody liked her, but who hated her enough to kill?"

"The night watchman said no strangers were seen that night near her entry. I'm wondering about the people right on her floor."

"Do any of them take that drug for the blood?" Mamma asked.

"Yes, one. But all the others could have easily swiped some of it."

"Which one takes it?"

"Miss Kirsten Schmidlapp, the invalid lady in W3, right across the hall from Miss Carpenter. She spends all her time in a wheel chair, because her heart's so bad. Her doctor has her on Dicumarol. She's such a nice woman, everybody feels sorry for her. All the neighbors go in to help her, so any one of them could have taken her medicine. Especially her brother. And he's the one who found the body."

"Yeah, that's right!"

"Miss Carpenter made him do all kinds of extra jobs for her, like bring her morning paper from the corner newsstand. And she was always threatening to fire the poor guy. But I don't think Steve's smart enough to think of baking a cake with Dicumarol in it. How would he ever get her to eat it, anyway? She'd never sit down and eat with him."

"Well, who else lives on the same floor? The Wagners?"

"Yes. Bill will probably be Manager now, and get a raise. He can use it. That wife of his is a great one for spending money. He worries about bills and then gets drunk. And I remember, before he got married, he was Miss Carpenter's boy friend. She was a good-looking woman, if you like that type."

He reached over to pat Mamma—even shorter and stouter than the druggist, and definitely not "that type."

"Hah!" said Mamma, but pleased with the pat.

"Say, Mamma, do you think she could have threatened to tell Bill's wife?"

"Why should Mrs. Wagner care what Bill did before he met her? I never asked you about your old

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girls—and you must have had plenty," said Mamma fondly.

Mr. Notopolis favored Mamma with an affectionate kiss.

"So. Who's next?" she asked.

Mr. Notopolis fed a new punch card into his mental computer.

"The Paganos. They were always fighting with Miss Carpenter. They might have got mad and clobbered her, but they'd never plan anything this complicated."

"Next?"

"The other apartment on the floor belongs to Maria Rivera. You know, the nurse. Now, *she's* more likely. She's high-strung and excitable. She'd certainly know all about Dicumarol. They say she's dated Miss Carpenter's fella the last three Saturdays and Miss Carpenter was burning. Now, if Miss Carpenter had killed Maria, instead of the other way around . . . Well, Mamma, you better go home. Here comes a customer."

All week Mr. Notopolis dispensed prescriptions, checked out lending library books, washed coffee cups, and in general went through the motions of running a busy, successful drug store. But his mind was occupied with the problem of the murder of Miss Ethel Carpenter.

His customers talked of little else, but nobody said anything constructive. The consensus seemed to be that it was a good thing—blessings on whoever had done the deed, and they hoped the culprit would never be found. Mr. Notopolis was agreeable, but somehow he couldn't bear the idea that he himself should remain in ignorance. He needed only one more little hole punched in just one card to tell him the answer. Then he'd be willing to file it away with all the other cards he kept in his head.

He tried to visualize Miss Carpenter's kitchen. All the kitchens in Briarcliff Gardens were identical. There was only one spot where there would be enough room for a table and two chairs. He imagined her, sitting on one of the chairs, her hard face heavily made up, her hair swept high in the latest style, stiff with spray and glittering with golden dye.

Who had been sitting opposite her? Why had that person come? Why had Miss Carpenter been willing to let that person in? What had they talked about as they lifted forkfuls of cake to their mouths?

Click! The machine whirred in his head and the only possible card dropped into place and presented itself clearly to his mind's eye. Of course! How could he have been so stupid?

For the second time that month this blameless little man decided to lie to his beloved wife. He called her and explained that an urgent prescription had been phoned in just as he was closing. The delivery boy had departed, so he must de-

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liver it himself. Ipecac for the Donaldson baby—she knew how frightening those croup attacks could be.

He locked up and strode on his short legs through the garden to Entry W, where so much had happened in the past week. Just think: it had taken him a whole week to deduce the answer. Notopolis, you're a dope! he accused himself. He rang the doorbell of Apartment W3. A voice called, "Come in."

He found Miss Kirsten Schmidlapp seated in her wheel chair in front of the television set.

"Steve's not home, Mr. Notopolis. It's his bowling night."

"Yes, I know. But it's you I came to see. Mind if I switch off the TV?" He sat down. "He was out bowling this same time last week, wasn't he?"

"Why, sure. Every week he goes bowling with the boys on Monday night."

"And that's how you were able to wheel your chair across the hall to visit Miss Carpenter without his knowing it?"

"Me, Mr. Notopolis? Have you become a detective? You sound just like the one who asked me all those questions last week."

"Forget the cops. I only want to get it all straightened out in my own mind. I wouldn't tell them anything. You just listen, now, and tell me if I'm wrong. What I think is, you had a plate of cheese cake on your lap. You told Miss Carpenter you'd found out how to make my Greek cheese cake and were going to claim the prize. And she asked you in to have a cup of coffee and try the cake."

"Why pick on me? Why not one of the other women?"

"One good reason. You're the only one who could have eaten cake full of Dicumarol without getting hemorrhages, like Miss Carpenter did. You take it every day. In fact, you'd get sick *without* it."

Miss Schmidlapp smiled sadly. "I guess I knew all the time that someone would figure it out."

"But why did you do it? That's the part I don't understand."

"Because she fired Steve. He was to leave at the end of the month. He's too old to find another job. He was so upset, so worried about what would happen to me . . . So I thought, this is something I can do for Steve after all the years he has taken care of me."

"One more thing I got to know. Did you really make a cheese cake like mine?"

"Sure I did. I had a Greek neighbor once, many years back, when I was a young woman. I taught her how to make strudel, she taught me how to make Yaurtoepita. It's easy, lots easier than the German kind. Only you got to know the secret—yoghurt! No cheese in it at all! And all these years I never told —I knew you needed it for your business. I kept your secret, so now you keep my secret? For myself,

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don't care, Mr. Notopolis—I'm an old woman, I'll die any day now. But for Steve it would be bad if they take me away."

"Even before you mentioned the cake, I said I wouldn't tell. Remember? But, you know, someone else might figure it out eventually, the same way I did. That's what worries me."

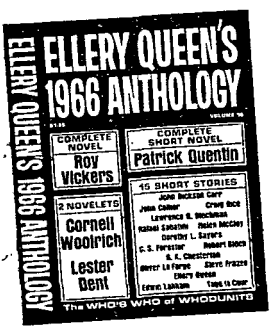
"You don't have to worry. To make the cake I used all my Dicumarol tablets for a whole month. I crushed them good with the rolling pin and put them all in. I haven't taken one for a week now. Any day I'll have the heart attack my doctor promised me. Steve will miss me—but it's better this way."

"Would you like to write out a confession—just in case they ever try to blame it on somebody else? I'll lock it in my safe, and never show it unless I have to, to save one of our neighbors."

"That's a wonderful idea! I'll do it right away." She wheeled over to the table and wrote a few lines. "Here. Put it in your safe. Now you go home before Steve comes back and asks why are you here. Good night, dear friend."

"Good night, Miss Schmidlapp."

Mr. Notopolis put the sheet of paper carefully in his wallet and walked slowly back through the garden of Briarcliff Gardens to his waiting wife. He fervently hoped he would never have to use the dying woman's confession.



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We are happy to welcome Fritz Leiber to the pages of EQMM for the first time—with a perfect blend of science fiction and pure detection (sfpd, or science fiction police department)—the pure detection being a perfect blend of the classical (old), the contemporary (new), and the constantly changing (futuristic) . . .

THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST

by FRITZ LEIBER

"I WISH," SAID THE YOUNG CAPTAIN, police chief of High Chicago, the turbulent satellite that hangs over the meridian of the midwestern groundside city, "I wish that sometimes the telepathic races of the Galaxy weren't such consistent truth-tellers and silence-keepers."

"Your four suspects are all telepaths?" the Old Lieutenant asked.

"Yes. I also wish I had more than half an hour to decide which one to accuse. But Earthside has muscles into the case and the pressure is on. If I can't reason it out, I must make a guess. A bare half hour they give me."

"Then perhaps you shouldn't waste it with a pensioned-off old louey."

The Young Captain shook his head decisively. "No. You think. You have time to now."

The Old Lieutenant smiled. "Sometimes I wish I hadn't. And I doubt if I can give you any special angles on telepaths, Jim. It's true I've lately been whiling away the time on informal study of alien thought systems with Khla-Khla the Martian, but—"

"I didn't come to you looking for a specialist on telepathy," the Young Captain said sharply.

"Very well then, Jim. You know what you're doing. Let's hear your case. And give me background. I don't keep up with the news."

The Young Captain looked skeptical. "Everyone in High Chicago has heard about the murder of the representative of the Arcturian peace party."

"I haven't," the Old Lieutenant said. "Who are the Arcturians? I tell you, for an oldster like me, the Now is just one more historical period. Better consult someone else, Jim."

"No. The Arcturians are the first nonrelated humanoid race to turn up in the Galaxy—nonrelated to Earth humans, that is. True, they have three eyes and six fingers on

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each hand, but they are hairless mammalian bipeds just the same. One of their females is the current burlesque sensation of the Star and Garter."

"The police found that a good spot to keep their eyes on in my day too," the Old Lieutenant recalled, nodding. "Are the Arcturians telepaths?"

"No. I'll come to the telepathy angle later. The Arcturians are split into two parties: those who want to enter the Commerce Union and open their planets to alien starships, including Earth's—the peace party, in short—and those who favor a policy of strict non-intercourse which, as we know, always leads to war. The war party is rather the stronger of the two. Any event may tip the balance."

"Such as a representative of the peace party coming quietly to Earth and getting himself bumped off before he even gets down from High Chicago?"

"Exactly. It looks bad, Sean. It looks as if we wanted war. The other member peoples of the Commerce Union are skeptical enough already about the ultimate peacefulness of Earth's intentions toward the whole Galaxy. They look on the Arcturian situation as a test. They say that we accepted the Polarians and Antareans and all the rest as equals simply because they *are* so different from us in form and culture—it's easy to admit theoretical equality with a bumblebee, say, and then perhaps do him dirt afterwards.

"But, our galactic critics ask, will Earthmen be so ready or willing to admit equality with a humanoid race? It's sometimes harder, you know, to agree that your own brother is a human being than to grant the title to an anonymous peasant on the other side of the globe. They say—I continue to quote our galactic critics—that Earthmen will openly work for peace with Arcturus while secretly sabotaging it."

"Including murder."

"Right, Sean. So unless we can pin this crime on aliens—best of all on extremists in the Arcturian war party—something I believe but can't prove—the rumor will go through the Union that Earth wants war, and the Arcturian Earth-haters will have everything their own way."

"Leave off the background, Jim. How was the murder done?"

Permitting himself a bitter smile, the Young Captain said wistfully, "With the whole Galaxy for a poison cabinet and a weapon shop, with almost every means available of subtle disguise, of sudden approach and instantaneous getaway, the murder had to be done with a blunt instrument and by one of four aliens domiciled in the same caravansary as the Arcturian peace-party man.

"There's something very ugly in the vision of a blackjack gripped

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by the tentacle of an octopoid or in the pinchers of a black Martian. To be frank, Sean, I'd rather the killer had been fancier in his modus operandi. It would have let me dump the heavy end of the case in the laps of the science boys."

"I was always grateful myself when I could invoke the physicists," the Old Lieutenant agreed. "It's marvelous what colored lights and the crackle of Geiger counters do to take the pressure off a plain policeman. These four aliens you mention—they're the telepaths?"

"Right, Sean. Shady characters, too, all four of them, criminals for hire, which makes it harder. And each of them takes the typical telepath point of view that we ought to *know* which one of them is guilty without asking questions! They know well enough that Earthmen aren't telepathic, but still they hide behind the lofty pretense that every intelligent inhabitant of the Cosmos *must* be telepathic.

"If you come right out and tell them that your mind is absolutely deaf-dumb-and-blind to the thoughts of others, they act as if you'd made a dreadful social blunder and they cover up for you by pretending not to have heard you. Why, they're like a woman who is forever expecting you to know what she's angry about without ever giving you a hint what it is. They're like—"

"Now, now, I've dealt with a few telepaths in my time, Jim. I take it that the other prong of your dilemma is that if you officially accuse one of them, *and you hit it right* then he will up and confess like a good little animal using the ritual of speech to tell you who commissioned the murder and all the rest of it, and everything will be rosy.

"But *if you hit it wrong,* it will be a mortal insult to his whole race—to all telepaths, for that matter—and there will be whole solar systems moving to resign from the Union and all manner of other devils to pay. Because, continuing the telepath's fiction that you are a telepath yourself, you must have known he was innocent and yet you accused him."

"Right, Sean," the Young Captain admitted. "As I said at the beginning, truth-tellers and silence-keepers—intellectual prigs, all of them! Refusing to betray each others' thoughts to a nontelepath, I can understand that—though just one telepathic stool pigeon would make police work ten mountains easier. But all these other lofty idealistic fictions get my goat! If I were running the Union—"

"Jim, your time is running short. I take it you want help in deciding which one to accuse. That is if you do decide to chance it rather than shut your mouth, lose face, and play for time."

"I've *got* to chance it, Sean—Earthside demands it. But as things stand, I'll be backing no better than

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a three-to-one shot. For you see, Sean, every single suspect of the four is just as suspect as the others. In my book they're four equally bad boys."

"Sketch me your suspects then, quickly." The Old Lieutenant closed his eyes.

"There's Tlik-Tcha the Martian," the Young Captain began, ticking them off on his fingers. "A nasty black beetle, that one. Held his breath for twenty minutes and then belched it in my face. Kept printing 'No Comment' white-on-black on his chest to whatever I asked him."

"Next."

"Hlilav the Antarean multibrach. Kept gently waving his tentacles all through the interrogation—I thought he was trying to hypnotize me! Then it occurred to me he might be talking in code, but the interpreter said no. At the end he gives a long insulting whistle. The whistle didn't signify anything either, the interpreter said, beyond a polite wish for my serenity.

"Third customer was Fa the Rigelian composite. Took off a limb—real, of course, not artificial—and kept fiddling with it while I shot questions at him. I could hardly keep my mind on what I was saying—expected him to take his head off next! He did that too, just as he started back to his cell."

"Telepaths can surely be exasperating," the Old Lieutenant agreed. "I always had great trouble in keeping in mind what a boring business a vocal interview must be to them—very much as if a man, quite capable of speech, should insist on using pencil and paper to conduct a conversation with you. Your fourth suspect, Jim?"

"Hrohrakak the Polarian centipedal. He reared up in a great big question-mark bend when I addressed him—looked very much like a giant cobra covered with thick black fur. Kept chattering to himself too, very low—interpreter said he was saying over and over again, 'Oh, All-father, when will this burden be lifted from me?'"

"So those are your four suspects, Jim? The four rather gaudy racehorses of whom you must back one?"

"They are. Each of them had opportunity. Each of them has a criminal reputation and might well have been hired to do the murder—either by extremists in the Arcturian war party or by some other alien organization hostile to Earth—such as the League of the Beasts with its pseudo-religious mumbo-jumbo."

"I don't agree with you about the League, but don't forget our own bloody-minded extremists," the Old Lieutenant reminded him. "There are devils among us too, Jim."

"True, Sean. But whoever paid for this crime, any one of the four might have been his agent. For to complete the problem and tie it up in a Gordian knot a yard thick, each

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one of my suspects has recently and untraceably received a large sum of money—enough so that, in each case, it might well have paid for murder."

Leaning forward, the Old Lieutenant said, "So? Tell me about that, Jim."

"Well, you know the saying that the price of a being's life anywhere in the Galaxy is one thousand of whatever happens to be the going unit of big money. And, as you know, it's not too bad a rule of thumb. In this case, the unit is gold martians, which are neither gold nor backed by Mars's bitter little bureaucracy, but—"

"Jim, you've only minutes left. What were the exact amounts?"

"Hlilav the Antarean multibrach had received 1024 gold martians, Hrohrakak the Polarian centipedal 1000 gold martians, Fa the Rigelian composite 1728 gold martians, Tlik-Tcha the Martian coleopteroid 666 gold martians."

"Ah—" the Old Lieutenant said very softly. "The number of the beast."

"What's that, Sean?"

" 'Here is wisdom,' " quoted the Old Lieutenant, still speaking very softly. " 'Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man'; *Revelation*, chapter thirteen, verse eighteen. *Revelation*, Jim the last book in the Bible."

"I know that," the Young Captain said excitedly. "I also know the next words, if only because they're a favorite with numerology crackpots—of whom I see quite a few at the station. The next words are: 'and his number is six hundred threescore and six.' Why, that's Tlik-Tcha's—that's the number of his gold martians! And we've always known that the League of the Beasts got some of its mumbo-jumbo from Earth, so why not from its Bible?

"Sean, you clever old devil, I'm going to play your hunch." The Young Captain sprang up. "I'm going back to the station and have the four of them in and accuse Tlik-Tcha to his face."

The Old Lieutenant lifted a hand. "One moment, Jim," he said sharply. "You're to go back to the station, to be sure, and have the four of them in, yes—but you're to accuse Fa the Rigelian."

The Young Captain almost sat down again, involuntarily. "But that doesn't make sense, Sean," he protested. "Fa's number is 1728. That doesn't fit your clue. It's not the number of the beast."

"Beasts have all sorts of numbers, Jim," the Old Lieutenant said. "The one you want is 1728."

"But your reason, Sean? Give me your reason."

"No. There's no time and you mightn't believe me if I did. You asked for my advice and I've given it to you. Accuse Fa the Rigelian."

"But—"

"That's all, Jim."

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Minutes later, the Young Captain was back at the station and the moment of decision weighed sickeningly upon him. What a fool he'd been, he told himself savagely, to waste his time on such an old dodderer! The nerve of the man, giving out with advice—orders, practically! —that he refused to justify, behaving with the whimsicality, the stubbornness—yes, the insolence! —that only the retired man can afford.

He scanned the four alien faces confronting him across the station desk—Tlik-Tcha's like a section of ebon bowling ball down to the three deeply recessed perceptors; Hrohrakak's a large black floor mop faintly quivering; Fa's pale and humanoid, but oversize, like an emperor's death mask; Hlilav's a cluster of serially blinking eyes and greenish jowls.

He wished he could toss them all in a bag and reach in—wearing an armorplated glove—and pick one.

The room stank of disinfectants and unwashed alienity—the familiar reek of the old time police station greatly diversified. The Young Captain felt the sweat trickling down his flushed forehead. He opened wide the louver behind him and the hum of the satellite's central concourse poured in. It didn't help the atmosphere, but for a moment he felt less constricted.

Then he scanned the four faces and once more the deadline desperation was back upon him. *Pick a number*, he thought, *any number from one to two thousand. Grab a face. Trust to luck. Sean's a stubborn old fool, but the boys always said he had the damnedest luck . . .*

His finger stabbed out. "In the nexus of these assembled minds," he said loudly, "I publish the truth I share with yours, Fa—"

That was all he had time to get out. The Rigelian sprang up, whipped off his head, and hurled it straight toward the open louver.

But if the Young Captain had been unready for thought, he was more than keyed up for action. He caught the head as it shot past, though he fell off his chair in doing it. The teeth snapped once, futilely. Then a tiny voice from the head spoke the words he'd been praying for: "Let the truth that our minds share be published forth. But first, please, take me back to my breath source . . ."

The next day the Old Lieutenant and the Young Captain talked it over.

"So you didn't nab Fa's accomplices in the concourse?" the Old Lieutenant asked.

"No, Sean, they got clean away—as they very likely would have, with Fa's head, if they'd managed to lay their hands on it. Fa wouldn't rat on them."

"But otherwise our killer confessed in full? Told the whole story, named necessary evidence to nail them and himself once and for all?"

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"He did indeed. When one of those telepath characters does talk, it's a positive pleasure to hear him. He makes it artistic, like an oration from Shakespeare. But now, sir, I want to ask the question you said you didn't have time to answer yesterday. You gave me a big shock then and I'll admit that I'd never have gone along and followed your advice blind the way I did except that I had nothing else to go on, and I *was* impressed with that Bible quotation—until you told me it didn't mean what it seemed to!

"But I *did* follow your advice, and it got me out of one of the worst jams I've ever been in—with a pat on the back from Earthside to boot! So now let me ask you, Sean, in the name of all that's deductive, how did you know so surely which one of the four it was?"

"It's more accurate to say I guessed."

"You old fourflusher! Do you mean to say you just played a hunch?"

"Not quite, Jim. It was a guess, all right, but an educated guess. It all lay in the numbers, of course—the numbers of gold martians, the numbers of our four beasts.

"Tlik-Tcha's 666 did strongly indicate that he was in the employ of the League of the Beasts, for I understand they are great ones on symbolic actions and like to ring in the number 666 whenever they can. But that got us nowhere—the League, though highly critical of most Earthmen, has never shown itself desirous of fomenting interstellar war.

"Hrohrakak's 1000 would indicate that he was receiving money from some organization of Earthmen, or from some alien source that happens also to use the decimal system. *Anyone* operating around Sol would be apt to use the decimal system. Hrohrakak's 1000 pointed in no one direction.

"Now as to Hlilav's 1024—that number is the tenth power of two. As far as I know, no natural species of being uses the binary system. However, it is the rule with robots. The indications are that Hlilav is working for the Interstellar brotherhood of Free Business Machines or some like organization, and, as we both know, the robots are not ones to pound the war drums or touch off war fuses, for they are always the chief sufferers.

"That leaves Fa's 1728. Jim, the first thing you told me about the Arcturians was that they were hexadactylic bipeds. Six fingers on one hand means 12 on two—and almost a mortal certainty that the beings so equipped by nature will be using the *duodecimal* system, in many ways the most convenient of all. In the duodecimal system, 'one thousand' is not 10 times 10 times 10, but 12 times 12 times 12—which comes out as 1728 in our decimal system.

"As you said, 'one thousand' of

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the going unit is the price of a being's life. Someone paid 'one thousand' gold martians by an Arcturian would have 1728 in his pocket according to our count.

"The size of Fa's purse seemed to me an odds-on indication that he was in the pay of the Arcturian war party. Incidentally, he must have felt very smart getting that extra 728—a more principled beast-criminal would have scorned to profit from a mere difference in numerical systems."

The Young Captain took some time before he answered. He smiled incredulously more than once, and once he shook his head.

Finally he said, "And you asked me to go ahead, Sean, and make my accusation, with no more indication than that?"

"It worked for you, didn't it?" the Old Lieutenant countered briskly. "And as soon as Fa started to confess, you must have known I was right beyond any possibility of doubt. Telepaths are always truth-tellers."

The Young Captain shot him a very strange look.

"It couldn't be, Sean—?" he said softly. "It couldn't be that you're a telepath yourself? That that's the alien thought system you've been studying with your Martian witch doctor?"

"If it were," the Old Lieutenant replied, "I'd tell—" He stopped. He twinkled. "Or would I?"

Answers to QUEEN'S QUIZ

1. Earl (Derr Biggers)
2. Erle (Stanley Gardner)
3. (Edgar) Allan (Poe)—middle name with 2 a's
4. (Anna) Katharine (Green)—middle name with 2 a's
5. (Philip) MacDonald
6. (Ross) Macdonald
7. Their origin: both were probably inspired by the name of the famous real-life "thief and thief-catcher"—François Eugène Vidocq
8. (Arthur) (Conan) Doyle
   (Arthur) Morrison
   (Arthur) (B.) Reeve
9. (Rufus) King
   (C. Daly) King
   Rex (Stout)

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a *NEW* short story by

DOLORES HITCHENS

her first short story in 20 years!

We are happy to welcome the first appearance in EQMM of Dolores Hitchens—with her first short story in 20 years. Dolores Hitchens is the author of more than 50 detective novels—you know her not only under her own name but also as D. B. Olsen; she has also collaborated with her husband on a number of unusual railroad suspense novels.

Dolores Hitchens' new short story will, we predict, be a popular anthology selection in the future. It is written with deep empathy, and is full of significant and sensitive detail, of perception and pathos—"a sudden ache around the heart, and a quick stinging of tears."

SUGGESTION: *Please read Dolores Hitchens' "If You See This Woman" either just before or just after you read the next story in this issue—Patricia Highsmith's "The Heroine." Reading the two stories consecutively will add an extra dimension to your interest . . .*

IF YOU SEE THIS WOMAN

by DOLORES HITCHENS

JUNIE'S MOUSE-GRAY RUMP STUCK out from under the marble-topped coffee table. She had spilled an ashtray, hitting it with the duster, and now there was a mess of ashes and cigarette butts to clean up. She was fumbling with the last of the butts when Mr. Arnold came into the room behind her. She knew that he must be looking at her; she heard him say, "What on earth are you doing? Laying an egg?"

She inched hastily backward, freeing her heavy shoulders from the rim of the table. She squatted, looking up at him, pink in the face from the exertion of stooping and crawling. "Oh, no, Mr. Arnold."

He grinned at her in the way she didn't understand. "Chasing a butterfly? Would you actually be chasing a butterfly, Junie?"

"Oh, no, sir." Junie got to her feet, tugged down the cotton uniform, reached for the fallen duster

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and the ashtray. "No, I wouldn't do that, Mr. Arnold."

"I know—you were dictating a letter to the little man who lives under the rug. A love letter."

She shook her head, speechless now, backing away gingerly. She wanted to swallow; her throat ached with the nervous need to swallow; but under Mr. Arnold's malevolent grin her throat had dried up.

Mrs. Arnold came into the room from the hall to the bedrooms. "Junie, the baby needs changing." Mrs. Arnold had on the pink satin jump suit, gold slippers, and wore her hair piled on top of her head, all silky darkness and pink ribbons. She looked beautiful. She looked like a doll Junie had once seen in a store window.

Mr. Arnold had put his brief case on the coffee table and was lighting a cigarette. Mrs. Arnold looked at the brief case. "You're really selling the stock today?"

"Dumping it. Dumping every damned share. Willcutt is in with me, he's selling his too. Then we'll both buy it back for next to nothing."

Mrs. Arnold went to the wall and straightened a picture there. She turned around. Junie was almost at the door to the hall. Mrs. Arnold said to her husband, "Well, just be careful what you're getting rid of, just don't throw out the baby along with the bath water."

Junie hurried down the hall. The words rang in her ears. Mr. and Mrs. Arnold were always saying strange things, but this thing that Mrs. Arnold said every once in a while was the strangest and the scariest of all. Who would throw out a baby in its bath? How could you make a mistake like that? Or . . . could it mean that somebody might *want* to throw away a baby, might want to make it go down, down, down into the deep pipes, the lost places, the rushing water, the dark?

Junie shivered as she turned into the baby's room. Pete, almost a year old, was just beginning to stand well and to try to walk. He was a heavy, placid infant. Now he clung to the bars of the crib and gurgled as Junie rushed to him and put protective arms around him.

"Nice Petey."

At Sylvan Slopes Home no one had ever talked about throwing out a baby in its bath. You were taught carefully how to bathe a baby, along with how to dust and clean. But if you'd talked about throwing a baby away—Junie shook her head, trying to imagine the consequences of saying a thing like that at Sylvan Slopes.

They'd have sent you away—the principal, Mr. Willoughby, and the directress of instruction, Miss Gombie. They'd have given you a blue suitcase like the one you got when you were ready to graduate, and maybe some extra underwear, and a Bible, and $10. And maybe Miss

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Gombie might have cried—that a girl of hers had said a thing like throwing a baby away, sneaky-like, in its bath water.

Junie could see it all in her mind, see it quite clearly. She wondered where a girl could go in such a case. Where would you run to? She couldn't imagine.

She tickled Petey gently, got him to lie down, opened his rompers, and changed the didy. Then, since he was obviously all through with his nap, she put him in his playpen. For a while she squatted beside the pen, handing him toys which he threw at her, and once in a while reaching gently to touch the dark curls that covered his head.

"My Petey. My own Petey."

She whispered the words, glancing guiltily at the door to the hall. Miss Gombie had been firm. You must never, never forget that the babies belonged to somebody else. To their parents. Even if their parents had adopted the baby. There had been one whole lesson on just that alone—Miss Gombie had taught it herself. Standing in front of the class in her green suit.

"We must love the children. All of our girls here love children. All of our graduates are famous for loving children," Miss Gombie had said in her forceful way. "We love them but we don't *possess* them."

There had been a short, puzzled silence.

"We don't *own* them," Miss Gombie said, and the word *own* made her mouth round and funny-looking, as if she were getting ready to suck an orange.

Her listeners had nodded their understanding.

For several days Mr. Arnold went around whistling and snapping his fingers, when he was home; and Mrs. Arnold bought a fur jacket and two new hats. At dinner they talked about a new car. They seemed very critical of the car, and yet while she served, and listened, it seemed to Junie that they were going to buy it anyway.

Then for almost a week the house was quiet because Mr. Arnold didn't whistle or snap his fingers any more. Mrs. Arnold took the fur jacket back to the store. The other store wouldn't take back the hats. They no longer talked about the car, but about thousands and thousands of dollars, more than Junie could understand, and about something Mr. Willcutt hadn't done.

When Mr. Arnold noticed Junie, he asked questions like, "You gonna save ol' Massa from de po'house, Junie-bug?" Or "Think they'll take me in at Sylvan Slopes? I'll wear a wig and look retarded."

But Junie had no idea how to answer these strange questions.

Then at the end of the week Junie began to notice how cross Mr. and Mrs. Arnold were getting with each other. One night at dinner Mr. Arnold threw his wine

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glass at the wall and made a splotch, and Mrs. Arnold screamed. She mad-screamed, not scared-screamed, and in the kitchen Junie choked on her fright.

Then, watching carefully, Junie saw how they both began to get cross with Petey. Not so much at first, but when Petey caught the sniffles and cried at night, Mr. Arnold would get up and walk around and smoke, and say things quiet-like to himself. And Mrs. Arnold would make Junie get up and go to Petey's room and sing to him, and put him on her shoulder while she rocked in the rocking chair.

Then Mr. Arnold put a cot in Petey's room and told Junie she had to sleep in there, though this was against the rules. Junie knew they'd signed a paper before she came, saying she must have a room of her own.

One night when Petey was whimpering and Junie wasn't awake yet to walk around and carry him—she was tired all the time now, and slept heavily—Mr. Arnold came and threw open the door and cursed. He called Petey a damn brat and he called Junie a lazy, feeble-minded slut. His words bounced off the walls like bullets, and Junie cowered in terror.

They didn't love Petey any more. That was it.

He was sick now, and his face looked rough and red, and he cried a lot. There was no curl in his hair —it looked lank and had no shine to it; and his voice had turned into a hoarse croak.

The doctor came and left some medicine, and told Junie how often to give it to Petey. Mrs. Arnold didn't even come into the room while the doctor was there. She sat in the living room, holding a cigarette, and when the doctor went back in there, Junie heard her saying, "Bill, I don't know when we can pay you," and the doctor answering, "Oh, forget it. And chin up, Betty. Mark's been through worse than this and come out smelling like a rose."

Junie was faithful about giving the medicine, and about rubbing Petey with alcohol, and rocking him to keep him from crying. At times she would fall asleep in the chair, and only wake when Petey stirred. Mrs. Arnold didn't help at all. She smoked more and more, and stared out of the windows at the skyline, and spent a lot of time talking on the telephone with her mother.

Mr. Arnold came home earlier now. His face seemed thinner and paler. He drank more. And once while Junie was lighting the candles for dinner, bending close with the match, he said, "A vestal virgin. Tell me, how did your high priest —Mr. Willoughby—how did he initiate you virgins? With fire and incense?"

Junie looked at him and wished she might give a proper answer.

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"We weren't ever allowed to play with matches." For some reason this set Mr. Arnold off into hoots of laughter.

It was going to be winter before too long, but today was mild. The apartment felt overheated and stuffy. Junie served Mr. Arnold his toast and coffee, and took a tray to Mrs. Arnold in bed. Then she bathed Petey and dressed him in the blue rompers with the white collar. His nose was still red, his eyes puffy. She hugged him for a long minute before she set him down in his playpen.

Then she went back into the bathroom, Petey's own private bathroom, and bent to touch the outlet lever for the tub. She was stooped there when she heard the Arnolds in the hall. Mrs. Arnold must have got out of bed and met Mr. Arnold there while he was getting his overcoat at the hall closet.

Mrs. Arnold asked something that Junie didn't catch, and Mr. Arnold answered, "Willcutt made money out of my losses. He was supposed to be with me, but he cut my throat. Now I think I have a chance to get back at him."

Mrs. Arnold said, "So we're going to throw the baby out with the bath water. Is that it?"

Mr. Arnold seemed to get mad all at once. "You're damned right, we're throwing the damn baby out with the damn bath water and we damned well should have done it long before now."

Junie's hand, reaching for the lever, began to shake. She managed to touch the lever, though, and the cold metal sent a chill all the way up her arm and into her heart. Her heart felt like a lump of steel ten times bigger than her fist, a hundred times too big for her chest, pounding coldly there inside her.

"You're determined to go on with this?" Mrs. Arnold said.

"Yes, I am. Damned right I am."

The water began to swirl and growl down into the pipe. Junie stared at it. Pipes must be dark places. Far, far below the city, she remembered from somewhere, there were giant pipes like great dark caves. It would be cold there, cold and slimy, with awful gurgling echoes, with rats maybe. Junie had seen a woods rat once.

Who would want to put a baby into a place like that?

The thought scared her so that she ran back to be with Petey.

Mr. Arnold hadn't left yet. They were in the living room now; she could hear the murmur of voices.

She looked at Petey. He was playing with a rubber elephant, pulling one of its ears. Junie's heart pounded harder than ever. What should she do?

She had a telephone number in her suitcase; it was written on a piece of paper, pinned to the lining. Miss Gombie had told her, if anything bad ever happened to her,

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she was to dial Operator and give her the number and tell her that the call was collect.

Would they help about Petey? Was there anything Miss Gombie could do? Would Mrs. Arnold catch her using the phone and stop her?

Crouched beside Petey's pen, Junie began to cry.

An hour went by.

Junie wiped her eyes and tidied up Petey's bed, then went to the kitchen and washed up the breakfast things. She mopped the floor, not because it needed it, but because she thought she might try to use the kitchen phone extension. But then, when she peeped into the living room, she saw that Mrs. Arnold was already using the phone. Mrs. Arnold had on a white negligee, all fluffy, with gold embroidery; and her hair was tied up with a yellow ribbon. She looked hard and strange.

Junie went to her room and put on her coat. She stole back to Petey's room, put on his cap and coat and leggings, and took an extra blanket. Then she remembered her purse. She could never remember exactly how much she still had left of the $10 they'd given her when she was graduated from Sylvan Slopes. Her money was put in the bank for her—the salary she was paid by the Arnolds. There was a little book that showed how much she had and every six months it had to be mailed to Sylvan Slopes, for some reason; but Junie had no idea of how she might get money out of the bank. Now, exploring her little change purse, she found $2.30.

There was money in the kitchen, though, in a funny small jar shaped like a beehive. Mrs. Arnold called it "gin money" and Mr. Arnold called it "the devil's bankroll." Junie picked up the baby and the blanket, stuffed her small change purse into her coat pocket, and stole silently out to the kitchen. She found a ten-dollar bill and three one-dollar bills and two quarters in the beehive. She took it all.

She went out the back way. There was a service elevator here where the janitor took away trash and things, but Junie didn't quite know how to work it. And then too, she didn't want to be seen by the janitor. He might remember. So she carried Petey all the way down the stairs, eight flights, stopping to rest twice.

In the street she paused, bewildered. The day was grayer and cooler than it had seemed from inside the apartment. The trees in the park across the street looked bare and wind-bitten. Aimlessly, Junie walked for a few blocks.

Petey was very heavy. Her arms ached. She knew now that she should have brought the stroller.

Just at that moment she was passing an apartment house and a nice big carriage with a baby blan-

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ket in it was standing by the doorway. No one was around, though when Junie touched the cushion inside the carriage, she found it still faintly warm from the baby which had just been taken upstairs. Sometimes Mrs. Arnold had taken Petey out, and had left the stroller for the janitor to bring in; and remembering this, Junie decided that's what had happened here.

She plopped Petey into the carriage and ran for the corner, turned the corner swiftly, then slowed to a walk.

Junie thought, I can be smart like anybody else when I have to be. She felt pleased with herself, alert, vigilant for Petey's welfare, on guard against the world.

After a random stroll of eight or nine blocks she turned back in the direction of the park. She and Petey spent several pleasant hours there. They sat on the grass and Petey patted some dead leaves into dust and then tasted his fingers. He stood up, clinging to Junie's shoulder, and when some fat squirrels ran past he tried to wobble after them.

When she began to feel hungry, Junie put the baby back into the carriage and they went south, toward another part of the city. They ate lunch in a restaurant where you put money in a slot and lifted a small glass door and took out the food. It was an easy way to buy what you wanted. She and Petey had two moist turkey sandwiches and two glasses of milk and four pieces of custard pie. Petey ate well, better than he had for days; the fresh air and the exercise must have been good for him.

Right after lunch Junie realized that she had made a serious omission; she had forgotten to bring diapers. But then she remembered: sometimes in an emergency, when the diaper service had been delayed, Mrs. Arnold had used a kind of disposable diaper that she said came from the drug store.

D-R-U-G.

There one was. Junie went in, pushing the carriage. The person who waited on her let her change Petey in a room at the back of the store. The problem was solved.

She returned to the park. Petey took a nap, snug in the big warm carriage. He awoke later, and again was enchanted with the dusty leaves. But now it began to grow cold and windy. Junie thought over what she should do, and while she was thinking she noticed the buses running on the avenue next to the park.

She pushed the carriage out of sight, deep into some evergreen shrubs, and carrying Petey and his blanket and the package of disposable diapers, she went over to the bus stop. Ever since coming to the city she'd wanted to take a bus ride, but she'd never had the chance.

On the bus she sat in the back. Petey stood on the seat beside her, looking all around, making crow-

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ing and squealing noises. Several people noticed him, and smiled.

Junie took three different bus trips that afternoon, to various outlying parts of the city, seeing things she had never seen before. Coming back into downtown on the last trip, she noticed that twilight had drawn in and all the lights were on. It occurred to her that she and Petey had no place to sleep. Impulsively she turned to a middle-aged woman sitting beside her. "I'm going to have to find a room for the night," she said.

The woman looked at Petey and smiled. She coughed gently behind her hand. "Do you—uh—have any money?"

"Oh, yes. Well . . . some."

The woman nodded and in a kind voice she began to tell Junie where to find a room.

It wasn't bad. The bed was clean. There was a Bible in the bottom dresser drawer. In the front of the Bible someone had written *God is good,* and underneath that, *God forgives all.* Junie wanted to write *Even me,* but she couldn't find a pencil.

She put Petey to bed in a clean diaper, leaving on his little shirt and his socks. During the night there was laughter and other noises in the hall, and once somebody fell against the door so hard that the panel made a cracking noise. Junie felt comforted by the sounds, the nearness of other people. She wasn't really alone, she thought.

She didn't feel alone until she went out the next morning and heard the news broadcast in the coffee shop where she had breakfast.

At first she didn't realize that the broadcast was about her and Petey. Somebody had kidnaped Peter Bentley Arnold, aged eleven months. The public was asked to be on the watch for June Campbell, aged 22, five foot four, weight 150 pounds, wearing a . . .

June Campbell.

That's me, she thought, almost getting to her feet. She was in a booth, a very small booth back near the kitchen, with Petey squeezed in against the wall. They were eating oatmeal. The little cafe was warm and steamy and pleasantly filled with the odor of fried bacon. The radio speaker was almost directly over Junie's head.

She looked around to see if anyone was watching her.

The waitress noticed and came right over. "More coffee?"

"Thank you." Junie waited, expecting the woman to notice Petey now and to ask, isn't this the baby who was kidnaped, and Junie was going to say, yes, they were going to put him down the sewer, so I had to run away. But the waitress merely went back for the coffee pot and returned to fill up Junie's cup.

It occurred to Junie that she had better leave the city. She must get away from the radio broadcasts.

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Everyone would be listening, even the Arnolds—they'd hear about it now—and then for the first time Junie realized that the Arnolds must be the ones who had started the broadcasts in the first place. Of course.

. . . if you see this woman with this child, please notify the police at this emergency number—

Junie fed Petey a spoonful of oatmeal and kissed the hand that he put against her mouth.

We repeat—this is urgent—please notify the police . . .

Junie formed the words to herself: the police. Notify the police. She suddenly felt cold, empty, and scared. Not scared the way she'd been yesterday, at the Arnolds'. Then, she'd been afraid for Petey, for what might happen to him, and running away with him had been a great relief, almost *fun,* with the feeling that she was finally going to fix things. Now she had to run again, but it wouldn't be any fun at all. Junie didn't understand why this was so, even as she sensed its truth.

Urged by a sudden apprehension, Junie took out her small purse and counted her money. There was very little left. She hadn't realized how much it would cost to eat and to sleep, and to ride busses.

When she had paid for the breakfast there was hardly any money left at all. More scared than ever, she carried Petey out into the street. There were no radio broadcasts out here on the sidewalk but Junie felt conspicuous and exposed. Passersby glanced at Petey in her arms, and surely pretty soon one of them would run off to notify the police.

There was a friendly-looking man who had a newsstand. He wore an old sweater, pulled up around his ears, and a knitted cap. His face was red. When Junie paused there, trying to think, he made clucking sounds at Petey, and called him Old Top.

Junie turned to him as she had to the woman on the bus. "I want to get out of town the cheapest way I can," she told him.

"Lady," he said, "the cheapest way to get out of this town is on the Staten Island Ferry. You can go for a nickel and Old Top here can go for nothing."

"Oh, thank you. And how do I get to it?"

"Bus over there. See where the curb's painted yellow? Get the one says South Ferry."

"Would you write it out, please?"

Without curiosity he did laborious lettering on a scrap of newspaper, wetting the pencil stub in his mouth.

Junie wanted to ask, what is a ferry, but explaining it might take time. And something was telling her now that she had better hurry.

At the end of the bus line there weren't a lot of people getting off, but there were enough so that Junie

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could follow along and find her way and do the right thing without having to ask. The ferry ride was so nice that for a while Junie forgot about being scared, and running, and what might happen to Petey if they gave him back to his father and mother. She took in all the strangeness of being on the water, the sights and sounds of the harbor, the movement of the ferryboat under her feet, the smells of the sea.

She recognized the Statue of Liberty from a picture in a textbook she had seen at Sylvan Slopes, a feeling of stunned happiness coming over her; she hadn't really connected the picture with anything that actually existed, until now.

She thought, if I had time to take a hundred bus trips, I'll bet I'd see other things out of that book. Maybe they're all real and maybe they're all right around here some place. And then, standing on the deck of the ferryboat in the sunshine, it seemed to Junie that she understood all at once that the world was a beautiful place, that the sky was benign—a sheltering blue umbrella under which everyone could live at peace.

I love everybody in the world, she thought.

Petey most of all, of course.

Not sure what she would find at the end of the ferry ride, Junie bought three egg-salad sandwiches at the lunch counter below, wrapped them in a paper napkin, and put them in her coat pocket. The ferry came into its slip, bumping and sloshing—a scary time—and then Junie saw that the people were hurrying ashore.

She saw the policeman, too.

He was tall, and he looked enormous and frightening in his blue uniform. He was carefully looking at everyone who came off the ferryboat. Junie's first instinct was to duck back out of sight, to hide on the boat somewhere.

She actually turned to run, but then she saw that a man who worked on the boat—he was doing something with a big rope—was watching her. His eyes were dark and moved quickly; they ran all over Junie as if they were memorizing her appearance. She was choking with fear now, and her arms were so leaden it seemed that Petey was going to fall out of them and tumble to the deck.

Suddenly the man finished what he was doing with the rope and came over quickly—Junie was rooted to the deck—and he said, "Can I help you with the baby, ma'am? He's kind of heavy, isn't he?" And he took Petey easily in his big hands and Petey clung to the front of the man's leather jacket.

They walked up the ramp that connected the boat with the dock and went right past the policeman, who gave them an interested glance, as if he'd been told to look over *all* babies—only of course this wasn't the right one. Then by some

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miracle they were in another big room, almost a duplicate of the one Junie had waited in on the other side of the water.

The man tickled Petey under the chin, then gave him back to Junie. "He's sure a nice big husky kid," the man said.

"Thank you so much."

"It's not far to your bus now."

"Thank you so much," Junie repeated.

The man gave off a sea smell of tar and salt, and the sound of his voice was quiet and kind; the way he handled Petey showed how strong he was, and yet how gentle. Junie thought, I'll never see this man again, and there was a sudden ache around her heart, and a quick stinging of tears in her eyes as he turned away.

She had always wondered how you met a man, how you got acquainted with a man—the way Mrs. Arnold must have gotten acquainted with Mr. Arnold; and now she thought, it must be *this* way. Only for me it doesn't count, because I can't stop, I have to look after Petey.

At the end of the bus line she began to walk. She didn't stop until she found a nice beach. She put Petey down on his blanket and sat beside him. Petey seemed tired now; he looked at the ocean, at the waves rolling in, but he didn't try to find things in the sand and he didn't even want to taste his fingers. After a while he slid over to lie down, and went to sleep.

A woman and three boys of various sizes came to the beach. The boys ran and hollered, and the woman read a book. Junie would have liked to talk to the woman, but the woman wore an air of indifference, of defending herself by this indifference, as if the boys had worn away any ability she had to put up with other people. By and by the biggest boy yelled, "Mom, we're going around to the other beach and look at the old boat."

"Go ahead," the mother yelled back, not looking up from her book.

When the woman and the boys left, Junie went to see what was to be seen on the other beach. She rounded a crumbling small headland and came to a crescent of sand with an old rowboat lying on it. This beach was much more sheltered than theirs, so she picked up the sleeping baby and took him to it.

She investigated the boat. There didn't seem much wrong with it, except that it lay tipped on its side and there was a lot of sand in it, mixed with some orange peels and seaweed. Junie experimented out of curiosity, trying to straighten the boat. She was surprised at how heavy it was, and was unable to move it.

When Petey woke up she fed him one of the sandwiches. She built a sand castle for him, and let

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Petey knock it down. She took some seaweed out of his mouth.

At first there was just one siren, howling and whining far away, and Junie didn't pay any attention to it. In the city she had seen police cars on the avenue, and fire trucks, and she knew that the howling and whining came from one of these.

After a while, though, there were more sirens. They made Junie think of some sort of queer bird flying back and forth, emitting strange cries, hunting for something.

Hunting for something.

Junie scooped up the baby and the package of diapers, rushed to the rowboat, and crouched there, hiding.

It made a fine place to hide. The bow of the boat was turned a little so that the inside of the boat could not be seen from the bluff behind the beach. Junie listened to the sirens, now close, now far, and Petey chewed on one of the sandy orange peels. Though the air high above seemed to throb, to be filled with the noise of the sirens, right here there was a little island of stillness. She and Petey were shut away from the wind, from the sight of other eyes, from the howls given out by the strange hunting birds—from everything but the sun.

And the sun would not tell anyone where they were . . .

The sea turned gray, cold-looking. A fog began to gather, at first offshore like a misty wall hanging out of the sky, and then creeping slowly shoreward, so slowly that you couldn't see it coming. You smelled it first in the air—a wetness with a flavor of fish and salt.

Junie made a bed for the baby with her coat, snuggling him down so that the dampness and chill would not make his sniffles worse. She kissed each of his eyes to make them close, the way she had always done at the apartment, and Petey's fingers strayed out to tangle in her hair.

"Nice Petey!"

Lying beside him, she kissed the end of his nose.

"My Petey. My own, own, own Petey!" She spoke out loud, dreamily. No one could hear. No one could say, Stop it. And Miss Gombie and the Arnolds were far away.

After a while there were voices, echoing queerly in the fog from the top of the bluff. One man kept calling, "Hey, Joe. Over here," and after a while another man yelled, "Hell, there's nobody. It's a bum steer, that's all."

Junie slept, and when she woke she was shivering. The night had come and the only paleness in all the dark was Petey's sleeping face. She tried to cuddle under the edge of the coat, to share a little of its warmth, and then suddenly she realized that when she had moved, the boat moved.

She experimented, puzzled, but it was true. When her weight shift-

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ed the boat rocked on its bottom.

"Rock, rock, old boat," she said aloud, wanting to laugh at the queerness, and then she stuck a hand over the side into the dark, and found cold water there. She sat up.

The fog must be thick, thick, thick—its wetness pressed against her face and filled her lungs. She stared, but her eyes found no prick of light in the night; it was like looking into a tunnel, or into a well, or like being shut in Miss Gombie's coat closet when you were bad.

"They can't find us now, Petey. We can stay all night in our boat. We'll sail away, even. Tomorrow we'll wake up and we'll be somewhere else."

She kissed Petey's forehead and rubbed his cheek with her cheek. Then she rocked and rocked the boat, but though it moved in a kind of trough, it never did sail away. Junie thought, I'll have to push it.

The voices were back at the top of the bluff now; a man was yelling about bringing the light. "Bring the damned thing over *here!*" And then there was a great moonlike glow, all gold and strongly shining. Junie, in the water beside the boat, was wet to her knees. The coldness, the force of the current, were startling.

A sudden sucking current pulled the boat away, off into the dark, and for a heart-stopping moment Junie thought that it had gone, taking Petey and leaving her stranded on the beach. But then, by a dim reflection from the big light beginning to swing back and forth at the top of the bluff, she saw the stern, dipping against the surf. She caught the rim of the boat and jumped in.

The current took them off quickly. Junie could tell how quickly by the way the big light on the bluff diminished through the fog. She sang softly to Petey and the surf slapped the hull and every once in a while the boat made a quick turnabout, end around end, that almost left her dizzy.

"We're sailing away, away. I'm all wet but I'll be dry," she sang. "By and by, Petey, by and by."

She had gotten dreadfully wet from the ocean—so wet that it took a while for her to understand that all the water was not coming off her clothes. Some of it was bubbling up through tiny broken places in the bottom of the boat.

She tried stuffing the edges of Petey's blanket into the broken places, and finally parts of her coat; but when she realized that these were not going to keep out the sea, she picked up the still-sleeping baby and stood, balancing herself against the boat's movement, holding Petey as high as she could, waiting, loving everybody, and remembering the sky as she had seen it from the deck of the ferryboat that morning.

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Herschel Brickell rated Patricia Highsmith's "The Heroine" as one of the 22 best short stories published in American magazines during the year beginning May 1945 and ending April 1946. Mr. Brickell described the story as a "psychopathic thriller." Not the least impressive aspect of this story is the astonishing fact that Patricia Highsmith wrote it "between her sophomore and junior years" at Barnard College.

Like Dolores Hitchens' "If You See This Woman" (immediately preceding Patricia Highsmith's story in this issue), "The Heroine" is written with deep empathy, and is full of significant and sensitive detail, of perception and pathos—"but I just wish there was something more I could do for you—and for the children."

If you read Dolores Hitchens' "If You Meet This Woman" and Patricia Highsmith's "The Heroine" as a pair of stories, you will find that both, individually and together, gain a larger meaning. Sometimes 1 + 1 = 2+ . . .

THE HEROINE

by PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

THE GIRL WAS SO SURE SHE WOULD get the job, she had unabashedly come out to Westchester with her suitcase. She sat in a comfortable chair in the living room of the Christiansens' house, looking in her navy blue coat and beret even younger than 21, and replied earnestly to their question.

"Have you worked as a governess before?" Mr. Christiansen asked. He sat beside his wife on the sofa, his elbows on the knees of his gray flannel slacks and his hands clasped. "Any references, I mean?"

"I was a maid at Mrs. Dwight Howell's home in New York for the last seven months." Lucille looked at him with suddenly wide gray eyes. "I could get a reference from there if you like . . . But when I saw your advertisement this morning I didn't want to wait. I've always wanted a place where there were children."

Mrs. Christiansen smiled, but mainly to herself, at the girl's enthusiasm. She took a silver box from the coffee table before her, stood up, and offered it to the girl. "Will you have one?"

"No, thank you. I don't smoke."

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"Well," she said, lighting her own cigarette, "we might call them, of course, but my husband and I set more store by appearances than references . . . What do you say, Ronald? You told me you wanted someone who really liked children."

And fifteen minutes later Lucille Smith was standing in her room in the servants' quarters back of the house, buttoning the belt of a new white uniform. She touched her mouth lightly with lipstick.

"You're starting all over again, Lucille," she told herself in the mirror. "You're going to have a happy, useful life from now on, and forget everything that was before."

But there went her eyes too wide again, as though to deny her words. Her eyes looked much like her mother's when they opened like that, and her mother was part of what she must forget. She must overcome that habit of stretching her eyes. It made her look surprised and uncertain, too, which was not at all the way to look around children. Her hand trembled as she set the lipstick down. She recomposed her face in the mirror, smoothed the starched front of her uniform.

There were only a few things like the eyes to remember, a few silly habits, really, like burning little bits of paper in ashtrays, forgetting time sometimes—little things that many people did, but that she must remember not to do. With practice the remembering would come automatically. Because she was just like other people (had the psychiatrist not told her so?), and other people never thought of them at all.

She crossed the room, sank onto the window seat under the blue curtains, and looked out on the garden and lawn that lay between the servants' house and the big house. The yard was longer than it was wide, with a round fountain in the center and two flagstone walks lying like a crooked cross in the grass. There were benches here and there, against a tree, under an arbor, that seemed to be made of white lace. A beautiful yard!

And the house was the house of her dreams! A white, two-story house with dark-red shutters, with oaken doors and brass knockers and latches that opened with a press of the thumb . . . and broad lawns and poplar trees so dense and high one could not see through, so that one did not have to admit or believe that there was another house somewhere beyond . . . The rain-streaked Howell house in New York, granite pillared and heavily ornamented, had looked, Lucille thought, like a stale wedding cake in a row of other stale wedding cakes.

She rose suddenly from her seat. The Christiansen house was blooming, friendly, and alive! There were children in it. Thank God for the children! But she had not even met them yet.

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She hurried downstairs, crossed the yard on the path that ran from the door, lingered a few seconds to watch the plump faun blowing water from his reeds into the rock pond . . . What was it the Christiansens had agreed to pay her? She did not remember and she did not care. She would have worked for nothing just to live in such a place.

Mrs. Christiansen took her upstairs to the nursery. She opened the door of a room whose walls were decorated with bright peasant designs, dancing couples and dancing animals, and twisting trees in blossom. There were twin beds of buff-colored oak, and the floor was yellow linoleum, spotlessly clean.

The two children lay on the floor in one corner, amid scattered crayons and picture books.

"Children, this is your new nurse," their mother said. "Her name is Lucille."

The little boy stood up and said, "How do you do," as he solemnly held out a crayon-stained hand.

Lucille took it, and with a slow nod of her head repeated his greeting.

"And Heloise," Mrs. Christiansen said, leading the second child, who was smaller, toward Lucille.

Heloise stared up at the figure in white and said, "How do you do."

"Nicky is nine and Heloise six," Mrs. Christiansen told her.

"Yes," Lucille said. She noticed that both children had a touch of red in their blond hair, like their father. Both wore blue overalls without shirts, and their backs and shoulders were sun-brown beneath the straps.

Lucille could not take her eyes from them. They were the perfect children of her perfect house. They looked up at her frankly, with no mistrust, no hostility. Only love, and some childlike curiosity.

". . . and most people do prefer living where there's more country," Mrs. Christiansen was saying.

"Oh, yes . . . yes, ma'am. It's ever so much nicer here than in the city."

Mrs. Christiansen was smoothing the little girl's hair with a tenderness that fascinated Lucille. "It's just about time for their lunch," she said. "You'll have your meals up here, Lucille. And would you like tea or coffee or milk?"

"I'd like coffee, please."

"All right, Lisabeth will be up with the lunch in a few minutes." She paused at the door. "You aren't nervous about anything, are you, Lucille?" she asked in a low voice.

"Oh, no, ma'am."

"Well, you mustn't be." She seemed about to say something else, but she only smiled and went out.

Lucille stared after her, wondering what that something else might have been.

"You're a lot prettier than Catherine," Nicky told her.

She turned around. "Who's Catherine?" Lucille seated herself on a

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hassock, and as she gave all her attention to the two children who still gazed at her, she felt her shoulders relax their tension.

"Catherine was our nurse before. She went back to Scotland because of the war. I'm glad you're here. We didn't like Catherine."

Heloise stood with her hands behind her back, swaying from side to side as she regarded Lucille. "No," she said, "we didn't like Catherine."

Nicky stared at his sister. "You shouldn't say that. That's what I said!"

Lucille laughed and hugged her knees. Then Nicky and Heloise laughed too.

A colored maid entered with a steaming tray and set it on the table in the center of the room. She was slender and of indefinite age. "I'm Lisabeth Jenkins, miss," she said shyly as she laid some paper napkins at three places.

"My name's Lucille Smith," the girl said.

"Well, I'll leave you to do the rest, miss. If you need anything else, just holler." She went out, her hips small and hard-looking under the blue uniform.

The three sat down to the table, and Lucille lifted the cover from the large dish, exposing three parsley-garnished omelets, bright yellow in the bar of sunlight that crossed the table. But first there was tomato soup for her to ladle out, and triangles of buttered toast to pass. Her coffee was in a silver pot, and the children had two large glasses of milk.

The table was low for Lucille, but she did not mind. It was so wonderful merely to be sitting here with these children, with the sun warm and cheerful on the yellow linoleum floor, on the table, on Heloise's ruddy face opposite her. How pleasant not to be in the Howell house! She had always been clumsy there. But here it would not matter if she dropped a pewter cover or let a gravy spoon fall in someone's lap. The children would only laugh.

Lucille sipped her coffee.

"Aren't you going to eat?" Heloise asked, her her mouth already full.

The cup slipped in Lucille's fingers and she spilled half her coffee on the cloth. No, it was not cloth, thank goodness, but oilcloth. She could get it up with a paper towel, and Lisabeth would never know.

"Piggy!" laughed Heloise.

"Heloise!" Nicky admonished, and went to fetch some paper towels from the bathroom.

They mopped up together.

"Dad always gives us a little of his coffee," Nicky remarked as he took his place again.

Lucille had been wondering whether the children would mention the accident to their mother. She sensed that Nicky was offering her a bribe. "Does he?" she asked.

"He pours a little in our milk,"

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Nicky went on, "just so we can see the color."

"Like this?" And Lucille poured a bit from the graceful silver spout into each glass.

The children gasped with pleasure. "Yes!"

"Mother doesn't like us to have coffee," Nicky explained, "but when she's not looking, Dad lets us have a little like you did. Dad says his day wouldn't be any good without his coffee, and I'm the same way. Gosh, Catherine wouldn't give us any coffee like that, would she, Heloise?"

"Not her!" Heloise took a long delicious draught from her glass which she held with both hands.

Lucille felt a glow rise from deep inside her until it settled in her face and burned there. The children liked her, there was no doubt of that.

She remembered now how often she had gone to the public parks in the city, during the three years she had worked as maid in various houses (to be a maid was all she was fit for, she used to think), merely to sit on a bench and watch the children play. But the children there had usually been dirty or foul-mouthed, and she herself had always been an outsider. Once she had seen a mother slap her own child across the face. She remembered how she had fled in pain and horror.

"Why do you have such big eyes?" Heloise demanded.

Lucille started. "My mother had big eyes too," she said deliberately, like a confession.

"Oh," Heloise replied, satisfied.

Lucille cut slowly into the omelet she did not want. Her mother had been dead three weeks now. Only three weeks and it seemed much, much longer. That was because she was forgetting, she thought, forgetting all the hopeless hope of the last three years, that her mother might recover in the sanatorium. But recover to what? The illness was something separate, something which had killed her.

It had been senseless to hope for a complete sanity which she knew her mother had never had. Even the doctors had told her that. And they had told her other things, too, about herself. Good, encouraging things they were, that she was as normal as her father had been.

Looking at Heloise's friendly little face across from her, Lucille felt the comforting glow return. Yes, in this perfect house, closed from all the world, she could forget and start anew.

"Are we ready for some dessert?" she asked.

Nicky pointed to her plate. "You're not finished eating."

"I wasn't very hungry." Lucille divided her dessert between them.

"We could go out to the sandbox now," Nicky suggested. "We always go just in the mornings, but I want you to see our castle."

The sandbox was in back of the

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house in a corner made by a projecting ell. Lucille seated herself on the wooden rim of the box while the children began piling and patting like gnomes.

"I must be the captured princess!" Heloise shouted.

"Yes, and I'll rescue her, Lucille. You'll see!"

The castle of moist sand rose rapidly. There were turrets with tin flags sticking from their tops, a moat, and a drawbridge made of the lid of a cigar box covered with sand. Lucille watched, fascinated. She remembered vividly the story of Brian de Bois-Guilbert and Rebecca. She had read *Ivanhoe* through at one long sitting, oblivious of time and place just as she was now.

When the castle was finished, Nicky put half a dozen marbles inside it just behind the drawbridge. "These are good soldiers imprisoned," he told her. He held another cigar box lid in front of them until he had packed up a barrier of sand. Then he lifted the lid and the sand door stood like a porte-cochere.

Meanwhile Heloise gathered ammunition of small pebbles from the ground next to the house. "We break the door down and the good soldiers come down the hill across the bridge. Then I'm saved!"

"Don't tell her! She'll see!"

Seriously Nicky thumped the pebbles from the rim of the sandbox opposite the castle door, while Heloise behind the castle thrust a hand forth to repair the destruction as much as she could between shots, for besides being the captured princess she was the defending army.

Suddenly Nicky stopped and looked at Lucille. "Dad knows how to shoot with a stick. He puts the rock on one end and hits the other. That's a balliska."

"Ballista," Lucille said.

"Golly, how did *you* know?"

"I read it in a book—about castles."

"Golly!" Nicky went back to his thumping, embarrassed that he had pronounced the word wrong. "We got to get the good soldiers out fast. They're captured, see? Then when they're released that means we can all fight together and *take the castle!*"

"And save the princess!" Heloise put in.

As she watched, Lucille found herself wishing for some real catastrophe, something dangerous and terrible to befall Heloise, so that she might throw herself between her and the attacker, and prove her great courage and devotion. She would be seriously wounded herself, perhaps with a bullet or a knife, but she would beat off the assailant. Then the Christiansens would love her and keep her with them always. If some madman were to come upon them suddenly now, someone with a slack mouth and bloodshot eyes, she would not be afraid for an instant.

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She watched the sand wall crumble and the first good soldier marble struggled free and came wobbling down the hill. Nicky and Heloise whooped with joy. The wall gave way completely, and two, three, four soldiers followed the first, their stripes turning gaily over the sand.

Lucile leaned forward. Now she understood! She was like the good soldiers imprisoned in the castle. The castle was the Howell house in the city, and Nicky and Heloise had set her free. She was free to do good deeds. And now if only something would happen . . .

"O-o-ow!"

It was Heloise. Nicky had mashed one of her fingers against the edge of the box as they struggled to get the same marble.

Lucille seized the child's hand, her heart thumping at the sight of the blood that rose from many little points in the scraped flesh. "Heloise, does it hurt very much?"

"Oh, she wasn't supposed to touch the marbles in the first place!" Disgruntled, Nicky sat in the sand.

Lucille held her handkerchief over the finger and half carried her into the house, frantic lest Lisabeth or Mrs. Christiansen see them. She took Heloise into the bathroom that adjoined the nursery, and in the medicine cabinet found merurochrome and gauze.

Gently she washed the finger. It was only a small scrape, and Heloise stopped her tears when she saw how slight it was.

"See, it's just a little scratch!" Lucille said, but that was only to calm the child. To her it was not a little scratch. It was a terrible thing to happen the first afternoon she was in charge, a catastrophe she had failed to prevent. She wished over and over that the hurt might be in her own hand, twice as severe.

Heloise smiled as she let the bandage be tied. "Don't punish Nicky," she said. "He didn't mean to do it. He just plays rough."

But Lucille had no idea of punishing Nicky. She wanted only to punish herself, to seize a stick and thrust it into her own palm.

"Why do you make your teeth like that?"

"I—I thought it might be hurting you."

"It doesn't hurt any more." And Heloise went skipping out of the bathroom. She leaped onto her bed and lay on the tan cover that fitted the corners and came all the way to the floor. Her bandaged finger showed startlingly white against the brown of her arm.

"We have to take our afternoon nap now," she told Lucille, and closed her eyes. "Goodbye."

"Goodbye," Lucille answered, and tried to smile.

She went down to get Nicky and when they came up the steps Mrs. Christiansen was at the nursery door.

Lucille blanched. "I don't think

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it's bad, ma'am. It—it's a scratch from the sandbox."

"Heloise's finger? Oh, no, don't worry, my dear. They're always getting little scratches. It does them good. Makes them more careful."

Mrs. Christiansen went in and sat on the edge of Nicky's bed. "Nicky, dear, you must learn to be more gentle. Just see how you frightened Lucille!" She laughed and ruffled his hair.

Lucille watched from the doorway. Again she felt herself an outsider, but this time because of her incompetence. Yet how different this was from the scenes she had witnessed in the parks!

Mrs. Christiansen patted Lucille's shoulder as she went out. "They'll forget all about it by nightfall."

"Nightfall," Lucille whispered as she went back into the nursery. "What a beautiful word!"

While the children slept, Lucille looked through an illustrated book of *Pinocchio*. She was avid for stories, any kind of stories, but most of all adventure stories and fairy tales. And at her elbow on the children's shelf there were scores of them. It would take her months to read them all. It did not matter that they were for children. In fact, she found that kind more to her liking, because such stories were illustrated with pictures of animals dressed up, and tables and houses and all sorts of things come to life.

Now she turned the pages of *Pinocchio* with a sense of contentment and happiness so strong that it intruded on the story she was reading. The doctor at the sanatorium had encouraged her reading, she remembered, and had told her to go to movies too. "Be with normal people and forget all about your mother's difficulties. . . ." (Difficulties, he had called it then, but all other times he had said "strain." Strain it was, like a thread, running through the generations. She had thought, through her.)

Lucille could still see the psychiatrist's face, his head turned a little to one side, his glasses in his hand as he spoke, just as she had thought a psychiatrist should look. "Just because your mother had a strain, there's no reason why you should not be as normal as your father was. I have every reason to believe you are. You are an intelligent girl, Lucille. Get yourself a job out of the city—relax, enjoy life. I want you to forget even the house your family lived in. After a year in the country—"

That, too, was three weeks ago, just after her mother had died in the ward. And what the doctor said was true. In this house where there were peace and love, beauty and children, she could feel the moils of the city sloughing off her like a snake's outworn skin. Already, in this one half day! In a week she would forget forever her mother's face.

With a little gasp of joy that was

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almost ecstasy she turned to the bookshelf and chose at random six all, slender, brightly colored books. One she laid open, face down, in her lap. Another she opened and leaned against her breast. Still holding the rest in one hand, she pressed her face into *Pinocchio's* pages, her eyes half closed.

Slowly she rocked back and forth in the chair, conscious of nothing but her own happiness and gratitude. The chimes downstairs struck three times, but she did not hear them.

"What are you doing?" Nicky asked, his voice politely curious.

Lucille brought the book down from her face. When the meaning of his question struck her, she flushed and smiled like a happy but guilty child. "Reading!" she laughed.

Nicky laughed too. "You read awful close."

"Ya-yuss," said Heloise, who had also sat up.

Nicky came over and examined the books in her lap. "We get up at three o'clock. Would you read to us now? Catherine always read to us till dinner."

"Shall I read to you out of *Pinocchio*?" Lucille suggested, happy that she might possibly share with them the happiness she had gained from the first pages of its story. She sat down on the floor so they could see the pictures as she read.

Nicky and Heloise pushed their eager faces over the pictures, and sometimes Lucille could hardly see to read. She did not realize that she read with a tense interest that communicated itself to the two children, and that this was why they enjoyed it so much. For two hours she read, and the time slipped by almost like so many minutes.

Just after five Lisabeth brought in the tray with their dinner, and when the meal was over Nicky and Heloise demanded more reading until bedtime at seven. Lucille gladly began another book, but when Lisabeth returned to remove the tray, she told Lucille that it was time for the children's bath, and that Mrs. Christiansen would be up to say good night in a little while.

Mrs. Christiansen was up at seven, but the two children by that time were in their robes, freshly bathed, and deep in another story with Lucille on the floor.

"You know," Nicky said to his mother, "we've read all these books before with Catherine, but when Lucille reads them they seem like *new* books!"

Lucille flushed with pleasure. When the children were in bed, she went downstairs with Mrs. Christiansen.

"Is everything fine, Lucille? I thought there might be something you'd like to ask me about the running of things."

"No, ma'am, except . . . might I come up once in the night to see how the children are doing?"

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"Oh, I wouldn't want you to break your sleep, Lucille. That's very thoughtful, but it's really unnecessary."

Lucille was silent.

"And I'm afraid the evenings are going to seem long to you. If you'd ever like to go to a picture in town, Alfred, that's the chauffeur, will be glad to take you in the car."

"Thank you, ma'am."

"Then good night, Lucille."

"Good night, ma'am."

Lucille went out the back way, across the garden where the fountain was still playing. And when she put her hand on the knob of her door, she wished that it was the nursery door, that it was eight o'clock in the morning and time to begin another day.

Still she was tired, pleasantly tired. How very pleasant it was, she thought, as she turned out the light, to feel properly tired in the evening (although it was only nine o'clock) instead of bursting with energy, instead of being unable to sleep for thinking of her mother or worrying about herself.

She remembered one day not so long ago when for fifteen minutes she had been unable to think of her name. She had run in panic to the doctor.

That was past! She might even ask Alfred to buy her a pack of cigarettes in town—a luxury she had denied herself for months.

She took a last look at the house from her window. The chintz curtains in the nursery billowed out now and then and were swept back again. The wind spoke in the nodding tops of the poplars like the high-pitched, ever-rippling voices of children.

The second day was like the first, except that there was no mishap, no scraped hand—and the third and the fourth. Regular and identical like the row of Nicky's lead soldiers on the playtable in the nursery. The only thing that changed was Lucille's love for the family and the children—a blind and passionate devotion which seemed to redouble each morning.

She noticed and loved many things: the way Heloise drank her milk in little gulps at the back of her throat, how the blond down on their backs swirled up to meet the hair on the napes of their necks, and when she bathed them the painful vulnerability of their bodies.

Saturday evening she found an envelope addressed to herself in the mailbox at the door of the servants' house. Inside was a blank sheet of paper and inside that a new $20 bill.

Lucille held it by its crisp edges. Its value meant nothing to her. To use it she would have to go to stores where other people were. What use had she for money if she were never to leave the Christiansen home? It would simply pile up, $20 each week. In a year's time she would have $1040, and in two years

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2080. Eventually she might have s much as the Christiansens and iat would not be right.

Would they think it very strange she asked to work for nothing?)r for $10 perhaps?

She had to speak to Mrs. Chrisansen, and she went to her the ext morning. It was an inopporne time. Mrs. Christiansen was aking up a menu for a dinner.

"It's about my salary, ma'am," ucille began.

"Yes?" Mrs. Christiansen said in er pleasant voice.

Lucille watched the yellow pen-il in her hand moving swiftly over ie paper. "It's too much for me, a'am."

The pencil stopped. Mrs. Chrisansen's lips parted slightly in surise. "You *are* such a funny girl, ucille!"

"How do you mean—funny?" Lulle asked curiously.

"Well, first you want to be praccally day and night with the chilren. You never even want your afrnoon off. You're always talking)out doing something 'important')r us, though what that could be I in't imagine. And now your sal-y's too much! We've never had a irl like you, Lucille. I can assure)u, you're different!"

She laughed, and the laugh was ll of ease and relaxation that conasted with the tension of the girl ho stood before her.

Lucille was rapt in the conversation. "How do you mean different, ma'am?"

"Why, I've just told you, my dear. And I refuse to lower your salary because that would be sheer exploitation. In fact, if you ever change your mind and want a raise—"

"Oh, no, ma'am . . . but I just wish there was something more I could do for you—and for the children."

"Lucille! You're working for us, aren't you? Taking care of our children. What could be more important than that?"

"But I mean something bigger—I mean more—"

"Nonsense, Lucille," Mrs. Christiansen interrupted. "Just because the people you were with before were not so—friendly as we are doesn't mean you have to work your fingers to the bone for us."

She waited for the girl to make some move to go, but still she stood by the desk, her face puzzled. "Mr. Christiansen and I are very well pleased with you, Lucille."

"Thank you, ma'am."

She went back to the nursery where the children were playing. She had not made Mrs. Christiansen understand. If she could just go back and explain what she felt, tell about her mother and her fear of herself for so many months, how she had never dared take a drink or even a cigarette . . . and how just being with the family in this beautiful house had made her well

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again . . . telling her all that might relieve her.

She turned toward the door, but the thought of disturbing her or boring her with her story, a servant girl's story, made her stop. So during the rest of the day she carried her unexpressed gratitude like a great weight in her breast.

That night she sat in her room with the light on until after twelve o'clock. She had her cigarettes now, and she allowed herself three in the evening, but even those three were sufficient to set her blood tingling, to relax her mind, to make her dream heroic dreams. And when the three cigarettes were smoked, and she would have liked another, she rose, very light in the head, and put the cigarette pack in her top drawer to close away temptation.

Just as she slid the drawer she noticed on her handkerchief box the $20 bill the Christiansens had given her. She took it now, and sat down again in her chair.

From the packet of matches she took one, struck it, and leaned it, burning end down, against the side of her ashtray. Slowly she struck matches one after another and laid them strategically to make a tiny, flickering, well controlled fire. When the matches were gone, she tore the pasteboard cover into little bits and dropped them in slowly. Finally she took the $20 bill and with some effort tore bits from it of the same size. These, too, she meted to the fire.

Mrs. Christiansen did not understand, but if she saw *this,* she might. Still *this* was not enough. Mere faithful service was not enough either. Anyone would give that, for money. She was different. Had not Mrs. Christiansen herself told her that?

Then she remembered what else she had said: "Mr. Christiansen and I are very well pleased with you, Lucille."

The memory of these words brought her up from her chair with an enchanted smile on her lips. She felt wonderfully strong and secure in her own strength of mind and her position in the household. *Mr. Christiansen and I are very well pleased with you, Lucille.* There was really only one thing lacking in her happiness. She had to prove herself in crisis.

If only a plague like those she had read of in the Bible . . . "And it came to pass that there was a great plague over all the land." That was how the Bible would say it. She imagined waters lapping higher against the big house, until they swept almost into the nursery. She would rescue the children and swim with them to safety, wherever that might be.

She moved restlessly about the room.

Or if there came an earthquake . . . She would rush in among falling walls and drag the children

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out. Perhaps she would go back for some trifle, like Nicky's lead soldiers or Heloise's paint set, and be crushed to death. Then the Christiansens would know her devotion.

Or if there might be a fire. Anyone might have a fire. Fires were common things and needed no wrathful visitations from the upper world. There might be a terrible fire just with the gasoline in the garage and a match.

She went downstairs, through the inside door that opened to the garage. The tank was three feet high and entirely full, so that unless she had been inspired with the necessity and importance of her deed, she would not have been able to lift the thing over the threshold of the garage and of the servants' house too.

She rolled the tank across the yard in the same manner as she had seen men roll beer barrels and ash-cans. It made no noise on the grass and only a brief bump and rumble over one of the flagstone paths, lost in the night.

No lights shone at any of the windows, but if they had, Lucille would not have been deterred. She would not have been deterred had Mr. Christiansen himself been standing there by the fountain, for probably she would not have seen him. And if she had, was she not about to do a noble thing?

She unscrewed the cap and poured some gasoline on a corner of the house, rolled the tank farther, poured more against the white shingles, and so on until she reached the far corner. Then she struck her match and walked back the way she had come, touching off the wet places. Without a backward glance she went to stand at the door of the servants' house and watch.

The flames were first pale and eager, then they became yellow with touches of red. As Lucille watched, all the tension that was left in her, in body or mind, flowed evenly upward and was lifted from her forever, leaving her muscles and brain free for the voluntary tension of an athlete before a starting gun. She would let the flames leap tall, even to the nursery window, before she rushed in, so that the danger might be at its highest.

A smile like that of a saint settled on her mouth, and anyone seeing her there in the doorway, her face glowing in the lambent light, would certainly have thought her a beautiful young woman.

She had lit the fire at five places, and these now crept up the house like the fingers of a hand, warm and flickering, gentle and caressing. Lucille smiled and held herself in check. Then suddenly the gasoline tank, having grown too warm, exploded with a sound like a cannon shot and lighted the entire scene for an instant.

As though this had been the signal for which she waited, Lucille went confidently forward.

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The second in the new series about Cyriack Skinner Grey, modern scientific sleuth and EQMM's first wheelchair detective . . . about a man who murdered three wives and still felt safe enough to laugh at the police—and how Cyriack Skinner Grey applied his scientific "know how" to a seemingly insoluble problem . . .

THE SCIENTIST AND THE WIFE KILLER

by ARTHUR PORGES

"THIS MAN HAS MURDERED THREE wives in succession," Lieutenant Trask said, almost spitting the words out, so deep was his frustration. "Got away clean with the first two, and now he has the incredible gall to use us—the police—as his alibi."

Cyriack Skinner Grey, former research scientist, now a wheelchair case for life, gave the detective a sympathetic scrutiny, noting that he was obviously tired and badly in need of a shave.

"Sounds like a dirty business," Grey said, thinking briefly, and with a poignant stab of anguish, of his own wife, dead at thirty, at the height of her mature and scintillating beauty. Her wit and sensitivity lived on in their son, Edgar, a red-haired, chunky boy of 14 with an I.Q. of 180, and too much humor to be dehumanized by it. "How did your wife killer escape the gas chamber?"

"The best way—almost the only way—to pull a perfect murder," was Trask's grim reply. "Accidental death. The first wife fell down a steep flight of stairs—tripped at the top, he said; worn carpet. It *could* have happened; the hell of it is, we couldn't prove it didn't—not to a jury's satisfaction. The next one drowned while boating; another accident. He tried to save her, but isn't a good enough swimmer."

"What was the motive—the usual?"

"If you mean money, yes. The first wife didn't have much, but her insurance paid him $25,000, which isn't bad pay from a fifty-year old foolish woman—cherished for only eighteen months—who didn't know when she was well off. Number Two had some savings—around six thousand dollars—and a house worth another twenty-five or so. Not much insurance—he was too smart to increase it."

"He's intelligent enough to make it simple," Grey said, leaning for-

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ward in his chair. It glittered with several dozen gimmicks of his own devising; and Trask watched, fascinated, as the scientist fingered some almost invisible controls. There was a faint hum, and the chair's seat tilted to a more comfortable angle. Then a metal disk set in one arm glowed red-hot, and Grey lit a thin, very dark cigar from a humidor that swiveled in front of him and opened smoothly to reveal its contents.

"What's the probability of losing three wives all by accident?" the Lieutenant asked. "Pretty small, I'll bet. Be funny if the guy was innocent."

"The laws of probability," Grey said, frowning a little, "aren't like city ordinances, except in being misunderstood or ignored. On a short-run basis, nothing is quite as unlikely as most people think. Every hand one gets in a game of bridge is—if calculated in advance—just as improbable as a perfect one. Yet there are four in every deal."

He saw Trask's brows knit, and added, "However, that's irrelevant. Tell me about the latest murder—if it is one."

"Just another accident, supposedly. Only this time the fellow got even more brazen. You can fall downstairs accidentally, or drown, but how can you be electrocuted accidentally with no electrical appliance around?"

"I don't follow the 'no appliance' point."

"She was in the bathtub; she was small, the tub was big. Her loving husband, Samuel B. Clayton, phoned her at five thirty—from a safe ten miles away, in Oceanview. He got no answer to repeated rings, so he called the police. Pretty extreme measure, you'd think; most men would go home first, and make sure she wasn't out of the house on an errand, or shopping. Not this bird; he wanted witnesses, and had every reason to expect the worst, having rigged it that way, I'll bet my seniority.

"Anyhow, he met one of my cruisers at his door, opened the door with his key, and headed for the bathroom. If that was suspicious in itself, he had an explanation. She always bathed between five and six, for dinner; but, he claimed, she would always answer the phone. As to why he called, he said he wanted to tell her he'd be a little late. Mighty unconvincing, all of it, but more believable for just that reason; he knows a little inconsistency is better than a perfect, prepared story.

"Well, we break down the bathroom door, and she's there, all right—dead in the tub. With anybody else, I'd assume she'd had a heart attack or a stroke; but we know Mr. Clayton, so from then on I play it safe. We guard the bathroom until it can be examined inch by inch—and we watch Clayton,

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after searching him down to the skin. I'm sticking my neck out a mile—false arrest, the works—but I just can't let this joker get away with it again. Only," Trask added hoarsely, "he is!"

"You *broke down* the bathroom door?" Grey asked, his quick mind jumping to a doubtful point. "And yet she was alone in the house?"

"Yes, I thought of that, too," Trask said ruefully. "Nothing to it. Her sister admitted Mrs. Clayton always locked the bathroom door. Some quirk dating back to when she was a little girl, and her mother didn't believe in privacy."

"I see."

"All right, we learned from the coroner that she'd been dead only a short time. Naturally, Clayton had stayed away from the house all day, with plenty of witnesses to prove it. *But* the medical evidence also pointed to electrocution as the cause of death. I don't know the technical details, but a stopped heart, with no thrombosis or muscle damage, and certain other indications, are compatible with electric shock, and not much else.

"But there wasn't a suspicious thing in the room, in terms of electrical appliances. Gas heat, and a ceiling light that was sealed in tight and hadn't been tampered with. Besides, assuming he'd rigged a wire from one of the outlets near the mirror—only two outlets in the room, by the way—we were right there when the door was crashed, and believe me, Clayton wasn't allowed to touch a thing. In other words, if she was electrocuted, whatever did the job must have vanished before we got there."

"I can't accept that," Grey said quickly. "There are other ways to get electric current into a room."

"Agreed. And when Clayton beat us to the basement for a minute, I figured that was the answer."

"You mean he was allowed to go down to the basement—alone?"

"Hold on," the Lieutenant interrupted, raising one hand. "It's not like you think. He claimed he had to adjust the hot-water heater—that it had been giving trouble and might even explode. He started down, and I motioned Sergeant Baker to follow. Well, it was dark—Clayton said the bulb must be shot. He grabbed a flashlight from near the top of the stairs, and scooted down.

"Baker followed as fast as he could without knowing the place, and it's cluttered enough, as we found out later. Baker was even quick enough to use his cigarette lighter. I figure Clayton had only a few seconds at the most down there before my man was at his elbow. For those few seconds the flashlight was all over the place, Baker says, but what Clayton did, I just don't know."

"I'll tell you what he did," Grey said in a dry voice. He pressed a button, and as an ashtray appeared like a Martian mouth, gaping on

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ne arm of the wheel chair, Grey leposited an inch of fine snowy sh in it. "He disposed of the gimnick he used to kill his wife—that's what he did."

"I doubt it," Trask said stoutly. 'Let me tell you why. We soon relaced the bulb, and had a good ook around; after which the crime ab boys did an encore, in spades. There's nothing in that basement ut heavy BX cable. If he'd cut into ny of that, we'd've found traces—ie couldn't possibly cover *them* up n a few seconds. Like you, I hought, what the hell, he ran a wire to the main drainpipe, which s in contact with the water in the ub at the drainage outlet. That would explain the whole modus operandi nicely.

"Only, as I said, every power line down there is in BX cable, and I ssure you that none of it was tampered with. Now the fuse boxes are outside the house, so don't start hinking—as I did, damn it—that he just ran a line and screw plug from one of the fuse boxes to the drainpipe. He was alone in the basement for just seconds—that's all."

"I congratulate you," the scientist said, smiling wryly. "So far, your logic seems very sound indeed. If no current was tapped in the bathroom, or in the basement—" He stopped, and his eyes narrowed briefly. "Did you check to make sure the tub wasn't still hot—electric-hot, not water-hot—when you got there?"

"Not intentionally," the Lieutenant admitted, with a grimace. "But when we hauled her out, if the tub had still been drawing current, and on that wet floor—"

"Of course," Grey said, his eyes hard. "You'd have had a bad shock yourselves—might even have been killed. So," he added thoughtfully, "if he somehow used a gadget, he accomplished the remarkable feat of having it work long enough to kill her, and then disappear without his touching it. A very ingenious fellow—unless he is innocent." The last conclusion didn't sound wholehearted.

"Quite a fellow all around," Trask said, his face looking suddenly older. "If he gets away with it again, he'll not only have her money, but also my hide, all neatly nailed out to dry. I can hardly survive a false arrest suit for a hundred thousand bucks, which he swears to start unless I release him at once—which was several days ago!"

"So you held him. Was that wise?"

"Very unwise; but when I saw his fox face, full of gloating and a kind of malice, all but laughing at us out loud—oh, I know a cop shouldn't get emotional, but from all accounts his wives were pretty nice people. Desperately lonely and pitiful, but they didn't deserve Sam Clayton. I figured—or hoped—

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we'd find the gimmick that did it. I still don't see how we could have missed it. And that's why," he added fervently, "I'm on your back again."

Trask fixed anxious eyes on the scientist. "Tell me, do you see anything I missed—any possible angle? I've gone over everything in my mind a thousand times. I'm beginning to wonder if we've been hounding an innocent man who happens to look like a fox that's just cleaned out a henhouse."

"All BX cable," Grey murmured. "Not the telephone line, surely. I never heard of BX cable on that."

"No, you're right; the phone line comes up from the basement. But I was thinking only about powerful leads. You know, there isn't enough current in a phone to jolt a flea. And there was no jack in the bathroom to be gimmicked from another line with 110 volts. Not that you could do much with high voltage to a phone; it's ninety per cent insulator—rubber or plastic."

"No jack in the bathroom—hmm! I was wondering about that, but you just eliminated it."

"Then you don't see a glimmer yet?" Trask asked, disappointment edging his voice.

"Afraid not. But neither have I seen the spot."

"But you can't—" the Lieutenant blurted, and wrenched his gaze away from the wheelchair.

"Of course, I can't," Grey said cheerfully. "But Edgar can. He's not quite mature or trained enough for all the plausible inferences, bu as an observer, he has the sharpes eyes anybody could ask for. Edga will have a look at the place anc then report back to me. Is that al right with you?"

"You bet it is," Trask said. "I know your son is really a fifty-year old Ph.D. midget," he grinnec weakly, "but I won't tell anyone."

The scientist's eyes twinkled.

"If he didn't know more thar most Ph.D.'s, I wouldn't let him near my equipment, much less le him be my legs and eyes. Did you know," he asked, "that he's made a small but useful—and entirely orig inal—dent in the Four Color Prob lem?"

"The which?"

"It's been conjectured, but not proved, that any map—except for some bizarre types with corridors that don't matter—can be colored with just four different colors, sc that no two countries sharing a boundary are the same color. Well Edgar, at only fourteen—" He broke off, and gave a dry little cough. "I'll tell you about it some other time. Right now—" He pressed a button on his control board, and seconds later a buzzer sounded under his chair. "Edgar'll be right down. Will you take him over, and let him look around?"

"With pleasure," Trask said, his face losing some of its haggard tightness.

When the redheaded boy came

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down, Grey said, "Son, go with the Lieutenant. He'll tell you the kind of electrical gadget we're hunting for. I want you to go over the bathroom and basement particularly, and make a note of anything odd—any kind of discrepancy. Look sharp, lad—it's important."

"Gotcha, Dad," was the nonchaland reply. He touched Grey's shoulder—a brief, fleeting tap of affection—and his father seemed to glow for a moment. Then the boy and the detective left, leaving Grey alone in his wheelchair.

At the Clayton house Trask watched with a kind of wry respect as the boy, five feet of curiosity, apparently nuclear-powered, went over the bathroom, with special attention to the two wall outlets and the bathtub's piping.

In the basement, their next stop, Edgar peered at the mass of junk—old barrels, cartons, tools, trunks—and exclaimed, "Brother, what a mess this is!" Then he got to work, concentrating again on all electrical wiring. He scrutinized the BX cable, and admitted grudgingly that the crime lab must be right—it couldn't possibly have been cut or spliced in less than twenty to thirty minutes.

He then used a battery and some meters to check electrical continuity up to the tub—that is, he sent a small current through the main sewer pipe, into which the tub drained, and verified that the metal rim where the plug was seated did get "hot."

"A good jolt sent through that pipe," he told Trask airily, gesturing to the heavy cylinder that crossed a corner of the basement before burrowing into the foundation, "would reach the water in the bathtub, all right."

"Sure," the Lieutenant said, trying to keep his tired eyes from closing. "Except that there's no place here to get a good jolt from—except the BX, and everybody, including you, agrees that's not been used."

Holding a powerful police flashlight, the boy was now examining a black rubber-covered wire that came in through a hole alongside the window, went up to the ceiling, and finally through another hole, presumably to the living room.

"That's the telephone wire," Trask told him. "Not enough current in there to feel, even."

"I know," was the calm reply. "But Dad said to look at everything electrical—and what he says, he means."

Edgar had a fine little achromatic doublet in his other hand, and was going over every inch of the phone wire. Trask watched blearily, already seeing himself in court, flattened with a judgment of more money than he could earn in a lifetime. False arrest. No right to hold Clayton; previous "accidents" neither admissible nor relevant.

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Scratch one police lieutenant—killed by a fox.

The boy gave a little squeal of excitement, and Trask stiffened.

"What is it?" he snapped.

"*This* wire's been tampered with—I think."

"You think! Look, Edgar, I gotta go into court—anyhow, it's only a phone wire. So why waste time—?"

"Dad said—"

"Never mind!" the detective groaned. "Let me see."

Through the clear, glowing lens of the doublet he was able to make out two punctures in the rubber insulation. They didn't suggest much to him.

"There are gadgets to cut in that don't need strippers or tape," the boy said. "They just send two sharp prongs through the insulation—quick like a bunny."

"Not enough current, damn it!" the exasperated Trask roared. "Those blasted holes may have been there for years, anyhow."

"No, they're new," Edgar said. "Maybe they don't mean anything, but, as Dad always says, first catch your data—it was 'hare' originally, you know."

"I don't know, confound it," the detective groaned again. "But never let it be said I lack faith. I don't have any idea what your father and you are up to, but I'm hoping hard—brother, am I hoping!"

Forty minutes later, his inspection complete, Edgar led the way out. Trask dropped him at Grey's house, and half asleep, said wearily, "Ask your dad to call me if he makes sense out of your report. It certainly doesn't mean anything to me." And he drove off.

Usually he was hopeful, because Grey had a genius for breaking tough cases—a combination of solid scientific training and an almost poetic imagination. But this time—perhaps because he was so exhausted and worried—Trask considered himself sunk.

The next morning—not too early, since Grey must have guessed how badly the Lieutenant needed sleep—there was a call. It brought Trask to the scientist's house as fast as a cruiser, with siren wailing, could get him there.

So anxious was the detective that he almost forgot his manners, and barely managed to say hello before showering questions on Grey.

"Slow down," the scientist advised him gently. "I'll tell you everything I know—and some I've guessed, pretty wildly, but I feel, accurately."

"Don't tell me it was the phone wire, because we both know—"

"I will tell you," Grey said a bit sharply. "If you'll let me. Yes, it was the phone wire."

Trask opened his mouth to protest, met the scientist's level gaze, and closed it again.

"I will admit," Grey said, "it was news to me, too. But I make a point

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of checking things out, and talked to a repairman—a phone company expert. It's true that a conversation on a telephone is carried by a very tiny current. But what most people —including us—don't know, is that the *ringing* is another story. That takes about a hundred volts."

Trask gaped at him.

"A hundred volts! Why, that's as dangerous as a regular power line."

"Exactly. Clayton must have run a lead from the phone wire to the sewer pipe, which Edgar tells me is only eighteen inches away, using a quick splice that just pierces the insulation. At the pipe he either just wrapped the hot lead around the metal, or perhaps used a small alnico magnet to hold it there. Then, when he had a few seconds in the dark later, all he had to do was tug the lead free and toss it into some barrel or carton. He rightly figured that you'd suspect the BX, but finding it intact, would never dream a phone line was even involved."

Trask was silent a moment.

"Then his phone call—the mere ringing—actually killed her," he said in a shaken voice. "He knew she'd be in the tub when the phone rang."

"If she wasn't—then—he'd've called again," Grey said, his face stern. "However, I don't know how you can make out a case, even now."

"First we'll find that lead. He's already admitted the call, so we know the exact time of death. Then there's the punctured insulation. I can break him down, I'm sure; he won't expect we figured out his gimmick. But even if he holds out, there's enough for a jury. It all fits —the ringing of the phone call, his running down to the basement, the coroner's report—and that wire lead with prongs to match the holes in the rubber insulation. Oh, we'll trap that little fox this time!"

"I'm sure you will," Grey said grimly.

EDITORS' NOTE: The next case about scientist-detective Cyriack Skinner Grey is titled *The Scientist and the Vanished Weapon*. It will appear in EQMM soon . . .

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C12: DEPARTMENT OF BANK ROBBERIES

by MICHAEL GILBERT

THE DRILL SCREAMED AS IT BIT into the tough metal. The operator, a small man with a sad monkey-face, hummed to himself as he worked. It was the last of eight holes which he was boring, four on either side of the hinge of the strongroom door.

When he had finished the drilling, and had checked, with a thermometer, that the surrounding metal had returned to a safe temperature, he filled each of the holes with Polar Ammon gelatine dynamite, tamping the puttylike stuff delicately home with the blunt end of a pencil; then he used the sharp end to bore a hole in the middle deep enough to take the tube of the copper electric detonator with its plastic-covered lead of tinned iron.

When all the detonators were in, he collected the eight ends, bared them, twisted them together, and covered the joint with insulating tape. Then he collected a pile of old army blankets and, helped now by a second man, draped them from wires which had already been fixed across the door.

Both men then retreated to the guard door at the entrance of the strongroom lobby. Two of the bars had been cut out. They squeezed through the gaps, dragging the plastic-covered lead behind them.

In the farthest corner of the outer lobby stood an ordinary six-volt car battery. The first man separated the

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lead wires and twisted one of them round the negative terminals.

Both men squatted down, backs against the wall, heads bent forward.

Then the second wire, carefully held in a rubber-gloved hand, was laid on the positive terminal. The shock wave of the explosion pinned them against the wall.

The third man, standing in the doorway of a shop outside, heard the crump of the explosion and swore softly to himself. The next ten minutes were going to be the most difficult.

A newsagent, sleeping four houses away on the opposite side of the street, sat up in bed, and said, "Cor, what was that? Have they declared war?" His wife said "Wassup?" "Sounded like a bomb." "So what?" said his wife. "It hasn't hit us." She dragged him down into bed again.

Eight minutes. Nine minutes. Ten minutes. Eleven minutes. *What the hell are they playing at?* Twelve minutes.

The door of the shop opened and two men appeared. Both had heavy satchels slung over their shoulders. One carried the drill, another had the electric cutter which had been used to saw through the bars.

The third man relieved them of drill and cutter and set off at a brisk pace up the street to where the car was parked. Not a word had been spoken from first to last.

Police Constable Owens, of the Gravesend Police, saw the car nosing into the street. He thought it odd that it should have no lights on, and held up a hand to stop it.

The car accelerated. Owens jumped, slipped, and fell into the gutter. He picked himself up in time to see the car corner and disappear.

Police Constable Owens limped to the nearest Police Box.

A pigeon took off from Boadicea's helmet and went into a power dive. It was aimed at the head of a young man with a brown face and black hair, who had just crossed Westminster Bridge. Detective Inspector Patrick Petrella raised his arm. The pigeon executed a sideslip and volplaned off up into a tree. Petrella regarded the pigeon without malice.

It was a beautiful day. It was spring. He was starting a new job.

The message which had reached him at Gabriel Street Police Station had not been explicit, but he guessed that his spell of duty in South London was over. It had spanned three years; and he had enjoyed most of it, but three years in one place was enough.

He pushed his hat a little farther back on his head, and swung in under the Archway and up the three shallow steps into the main building of New Scotland Yard.

The private secretary, a serious young man in horn-rimmed glasses, inspected him as he came into the

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anteroom, and then said, "The A.C.'s ready for you. Will you go in?"

Petrella found himself straightening his shoulders as he marched by the inner door into the presence of Sir Wilfred Romer, Assistant-Commissioner in charge of the Criminal Investigation Branch of the Metropolitan Police, and—in Petrella's humble opinion—the greatest thief catcher since Wensley.

"Sit down," said Romer. "You know Superintendent Baldwin, I think."

Petrella nodded to Superintendent Baldwin, big, red-faced, conscientiously ferocious, known to everyone from the newest recruit upward as Baldy.

Romer said, "I'm forming a new Department. It'll be known as C 12. And, broadly speaking—" here his face split in a wintry smile—"you're the Department."

Petrella managed to smile back.

"You'll have two or three people to help you, but the smaller you keep it, the happier I'll be. First, because we haven't got many spare hands, and secondly, because smallness means secrecy. Your first job will be the collection and analysis of information."

As Romer spoke, an alphabetical index of subjects, from Arson to Zoology on which this remarkable man might be seeking information, flipped through Petrella's aroused imagination.

"On bank robberies," concluded Romer.

"Yes, sir," said Petrella. "Bank robbery."

"Not bank robbery in general. It's a particular series of bank robberies that's getting under our skin. Never mind the details now. You'll get those from Baldwin. What I wanted to tell you was this. There's one thing we're quite certain of: there's an organizer. I want him put away. That'll be your second job."

Back in his own office, Baldwin filled in a few details.

"The bumph's in these folders," he said. "It'll take you a day or two to wade through it all. It goes back about seven years. We didn't know that there was any link-up, not at first. The actual jobs are done by different outfits. All pro stuff. Chick Selling and his crowd have been involved. And Walter Hudd. And the Band brothers. We're fairly certain it was them who did the Central Bank at Gravesend last month. You probably read about it."

Petrella nodded. He had heard enough about high-class safebreakers to know that they left their signatures on their jobs as surely as great artists in other walks of life. He said, "What makes you so certain there's a link-up?"

"Three things." Baldwin ticked them off on the fingers of his big red hand. "First, they're getting absolutely accurate information. They've never taken a bank that

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asn't stuffed with notes. And that ı't as common as you might ink. You could open a lot of ongrooms and find nothing in em but Georgian silver and deed xes.

"Second, the technique's the me. They always work from an- her building. Sometimes next or. Sometimes as much as three four houses away—that means cing through a lot of brickwork. hey've got proper tools for that o, and they use them properly. meone's taught 'em.

"And last, but not least, some- e's supplying them with equip- ent. It's good stuff—so good it n't even be bought in this coun- y for a legitimate job. When Wal- r Hudd's boys cracked the Shef- ld District Bank they had to cut ıd run and they left behind a gh-speed film-cooled steel cutter at the London Salvage Corps ve been asking for ever since ey heard about it. It comes from ermany."

Later, installed in a small room ı the top story of the Annex into hich four desks had somehow en inserted, Petrella repeated uch of this to his two aides. The st was Detective Sergeant Ed- ards, a solemn young man with e appearance and diction of a ıartered accountant, who was re- ıted to be extremely efficient in e organization of paper work. he second—as Petrella was de- ghted to note—was none other than his old protege, Detective Wil- mot, from Highside.

"Who's the fourth?" said Petrella.

"We're getting a female clerical assistant," said Wilmot. "I asked at the typing pool who it was going to be but no one seemed to know. I don't mind betting though, as we're the youngest department, we shall get the oldest and ugliest sec- retary. Someone like Mrs. Proctor, who's got buck teeth and some- thing her best friends have got tired of telling her about. What do we do next?"

Petrella said, "No one really knows. We shall have to make most of it up as we go along. We've got to have the best possible liaison with the C.R.O. and the Informa- tion Room on the old jobs, and any new jobs that come along. Then we'll have to circularize all provincial Police Forces, asking for information on suspicious circum- stances—"

"Such as?" asked Edwards.

"First thing, we might see if we can get the banks to improve the reward system. At present, you only collect the cash if your infor- mation leads to someone being ar- rested. That's not good enough. What happens at the moment is, someone hears a bang in the night. Might be something, might not. They go back to sleep again. If there was a reward—it needn't be a big one—say, fifty pounds for the first man getting on the blower to

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the police station, we might get some action.

"Next, we'll have to circularize local forces—for information about thefts of explosives, losses of strong-room keys, unexplained caches of notes, suspicious behavior near banks, bank employees with expensive tastes—"

"Bank managers with expensive mistresses."

"That'll be enough from you, Wilmot. Do you think you can draft us a circular?"

"Can do," said Edwards.

"The three of us will have to be on the priority warning list through the Information Room, and the police station nearest our home. We may be called out any hour of the day or night."

"I'll have to warn all my girl friends," said Wilmot.

That afternoon Petrella was sitting alone at his desk staring at the tips of his shoes when the door opened, a girl looked in, and said, "Are you C 12?"

"That's right," said Petrella.

"You certainly took some finding. Nobody seemed to have ever heard of you."

"We're a very important Department. But very hush-hush."

"They haven't given you much of a room. My name's Orfrey, by the way."

"I can't help feeling," said Petrella, "that, as we shall be working together for an indefinite period in a space measuring not more than twelve feet by ten, I shall fir myself addressing you, sooner later, by your Christian name."

Miss Orfrey smiled. Petrella n ticed that, when she smiled, sl smiled with the whole of her fac crinkling up her eyes, parting h lips, and showing small, even whi teeth.

"That name's Jane," she said . .

About a week later Jane Orfr said to Wilmot, "Is he always serious as this?"

"He's got a lot on his mind," sai Wilmot.

"He might smile sometimes."

"It's make or break, really," sai Wilmot. "If we sort out this lot, h gets the credit. If we don't, he ge a great big black mark."

"It doesn't seem to be worryin you."

"Paper work doesn't mean a l to me. I'm what you might call man of action. What about con ing to the pictures tonight?"

"Thank you," said Jane. "I'm g ing to take some of this pape home."

"It's a serious matter, sir," sai Sergeant Edwards.

"What is?" said Petrella, comin up from the depths of his thought on the technical construction o strongroom doors.

"Our allowances."

"What about our allowances?"

"Now that we're working a Scotland Yard and on a special jo we ought to get a Special Servic

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ıcrement *and* a Central London ·crement. But the regulations say ıat where you're entitled to both, ıu can have the whole of which·er allowance you select, and fifty er cent of the other one. I've been ·orking it out—"

"And I thought you were doing ɔmething useful," said Petrella.

Sergeant Edwards looked aggrieved . . .

Two o'clock on a Monday morn-ıg, twelve inches away from Pe-ella's ear, the telephone screamed. Ie jerked upright, hit his head gainst the back of the bed, swore, nd snatched the receiver off the ıstrument.

"Job at Slough," said a courteous nd offensively wide-awake voice. They've pulled in the men in-olved: Ronald, Kenneth, and Les-e Band. There'll be a car round for ou in three minutes."

Petrella was still trying to button is shirt when he heard the car raw up. He finished his dressing ıtting beside the driver as they ped along the empty roads toward lough. The driver didn't seem to e pressing, but Petrella noticed the peedometer needle steady on the eventy mark. At that moment a notorcycle passed them, and he just ıad time to recognize Wilmot.

Inspector Lansell, of the Bucking-ıamshire C.I.D., was waiting for hem in his office.

"It was the North Midland Bank," he said. "They cut their way hrough from the cellar of an empty shop next door. Must have started some time on Saturday afternoon. Took all Saturday night and Sunday over the job. Blew the main strongroom door at half-past one this morning. A chap living across the street heard it, and telephoned us. We had a patrol car a few streets away, and we got them as they came out."

"Good work," said Petrella. "I'll have a word with them now, if I may."

"They're all yours," said Lansell courteously.

The Band brothers were small, quiet, brown-faced men, all with good records of regular service in the Royal Engineers. By six o'clock Petrella had got what he could out of them. It wasn't a lot. They had all been in the hands of the police before, and they answered, blocked, or evaded the routine questions.

Petrella had hardly expected more, and was not depressed. He was particularly interested in two pieces of their equipment: a high-speed electric drill with an adjustable tungsten-tipped angle bit which had been used to drill a series of holes down either side of the hinge of the strongroom door; and an oxyacetylene, white flame cutter, coupled with a small pumping device which stepped up the pressure and temperature of the flame.

Both were in ex-works condition. The cutter had initials and a number stamped on the base. It looked like shipyard equipment. There was

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a department in the Board of Trade which would probably be able to identify it for him. If it had been imported under license, it could be traced back to its maker.

Petrella had another reason for feeling pleased. The banks, some of which had jibbed at his automatic alarm-reward system, would probably support it now that it had shown results.

He said to Inspector Lansell, "Any idea where my Sergeant is?"

"Haven't seen him," said Lansell. "I'll ask."

But no one in the Station had seen him. Petrella traveled back to London on a train, crowded with coughing and sneezing commuters. He remembered the ice patches on the road and a nagging feeling of uneasiness traveled with him.

In the course of that morning he rang Information three times. No accidents to police officers had been reported.

At two o'clock Wilmot arrived, unshaven but unrepentant.

"I've got a feeling," he said—before Petrella could open his mouth—"that maybe we're onto something. It was a turn up for the book. I stopped just short of the High Street to ask the way to the Station, and I saw these two in an all-night cafe over the way having a cuppa; and I said, Oh, oh, what are *they* doing?"

"Take a deep breath," said Petrella, "and start again. You saw who?"

"Morris Franks and his broth Sammy."

"That pair," said Petrella, wit distaste. "What do you imagine the were doing in Slough at thr o'clock in the morning."

"Just exactly what I said to m self. I said, Here's the Band Brothers robbing a bank—an here's two of the nastiest bits work that ever come out of Whit chapel sitting in a cafe, two stree away from the scene of the crim drinking tea. This'll stand lookin into. So I parked my bike—I rec oned you could get on for a b without me—"

"Thank you."

"—and I hung around . . . fo hours and hours. They must've g through twelve cups of tea, eac Just before seven o'clock they com out and took a train back to Pad dington. I went with 'em. At Pad dington they got on the Metropol tan, got off at Kings Cross, an walked towards the Angel. Ther were quite a few people about b that time. I don't think they spotte me."

Petrella was prepared to believ that. Wilmot's urchin figure woul have melted as effectively into th background of Kings Cross an the Angel as any animal into its na tive jungle.

"They fetched up at a big build er's yard in Arblay Street. Jerr Light and Company. They walke straight in."

"Do you think they work there?

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"It looked like it. But that wasn't l. I hung round for a bit. Half a ozen others went in. I recognized ıe of them. It was Stoker. Remember him?"

"Albert Stoker," said Petrella. Yes. Certainly I remember him. Ie tried to kick my teeth in when was up at Highside. He was 'orking with Boot Howton and ıe Camden Town boys."

"If they're all like that," said Wilıot, "they're First Division stuff."

"Mr. Jerry Light would bear ıoking into," agreed Petrella.

That afternoon Petrella paid a sit to Arblay Street. Jerry Light's tablishment occupied most of the ɔrth side. It was the sort of place ıat only London could have proıced. What was originally an ɔen space between two buildings ıd been filled, in the passage of me, with a clutter of smaller ıildings, miscellaneous huts, ıeds, and leanto's, on top of, or opped up against, each other. ıch space as remained was acked, head high, with bricks, les, window frames, chimney pots, tchen sinks, lavatory bowls, ɔors, pipes, and cisterns. An outde flight of steps lifted itself above ıe cluster to a door at first-story vel which was labeled, MR. J. GHT.

As he watched, this door opened ıd a man came out. He was a very rge man, with a cropped head, ɛd face, and closely clipped mustache. A thick neck rose from magnificent shoulders and chest. It was a Sergeant-Major's figure—the sort of figure which time, and inertia, would play tricks on, reversing the chest and the stomach as inevitably as sand reverses itself in an hourglass. But it had not done so yet. Mr. Jerry Light was, he judged, not more than 45 and his eyes were still sharp as he stood surveying his cluttered kingdom.

Petrella walked quietly away.

Back at Scotland Yard he said to Edwards, "See if Records has anything on a Mr. Jerry Light. He runs a builder's yard at Islington, and you can find his full name and details through the Business Names Registry. Wilmot, I think it'd be a good idea if you went along and asked for a job."

"Suppose Stoker recognizes me? I had a bit of trouble with him myself at Highside, remember?"

"I'm counting on Stoker recognizing you," said Petrella. "Then if you're still given the job, it'll prove that Light's honest. If you don't get it, the chances are the outfit's crooked."

"Suppose they drop a chimney on me!"

"Then we shall *know* they're dishonest," said Petrella. He had little fear for Wilmot's safety. Wilmot was extremely well equipped to look after himself . . .

Edwards was the first to report.

He said, "Gerald Abraham Light. He *has* got a record."

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"Bank robbery."

Edwards smiled, and said, "Not robbing a bank. Assaulting a bank manager. In 1951 he was sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment at the Exeter autumn assizes for waylaying and assaulting the manager of the Exeter branch of the District Bank."

"Robbery?"

"Not robbing, sir. Assaulting. They knocked two of his teeth out, kicked in his ribs, and broke an arm."

"They?"

"There was another man. Alwyn Corder. He got twelve months too."

"Why did they do it?"

"No motive was suggested at all. Mr. Justice Arbuthnot, in his summing-up, called it, 'a particularly cowardly and senseless assault.'"

Petrella's mind wasn't on Mr. Justice Arbuthnot. He had experienced a very faint, almost undetectable tremor of excitement—like that of a patient angler near whose bait a fish had swum, not seizing it but troubling it by his passage.

"Alwyn Corder," he said. "It's not a common name. I could bear to know what he's doing today."

"If he's had any other convictions, he should be easy to trace," said Edwards. "Incidentally, Light hasn't. That's the only time he's ever stepped out of line."

"It's the only time he's ever been caught," said Petrella.

It was seven o'clock that evening before Wilmot returned. C 12 kep irregular hours. Sergeant Edward was filing some papers. Jane O frey was filing her nails. Petrell was watching Jane Orfrey.

"Hired and fired," said Wilmot.

"What happened?"

"To start with, it all went lik love's old sweet song. Mr. Ligh said I was just the sort of youn man he was looking for. Clear healthy, and not afraid of work He explained how he ran his ou fit too. He works for big buildin contractors. Say one of them's do ing a clearance job at Southen and wants extra help. Light send a gang down. Half a dozen men— a dozen—however many he want Light takes a ten per cent cut ou of their wages. They reckon it worthwhile, because he keeps 'em in regular work."

"What went wrong?"

"What went wrong was, just a I was about to sign on, in come Stoker."

"What happened?"

"It was a bit of an awkward mo ment, actually. Stoker went brigh pink, and said he'd like a wor outside with Mr. Light. So the stepped outside, shut the door, an I heard 'em yaw-yaw-yawin Then Mr. Light came back an said, very polite, that he hadn't ge a vacancy right now, but he'd l me know if he had one. So scarpered—keeping my chin on m shoulder, just in case anyone trie to start anything."

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"Lucky they didn't."

"I'll say it was lucky," said Wilmot. "Because if they had started anything, they might have spoiled this."

He took a handkerchief out of his side pocket and unwrapped it carefully. Inside was a lump of cobbler's wax. Impressed in the wax was the outline of a key.

"The key was on the inside of the door," said Wilmot. "I got it out while they were talking. Nice impression, isn't it? I know a little man who'll make it for us while we wait."

Petrella said, "Are you suggesting that we break into this office?"

"That's right. We could get over the side wall. Borrow a ladder. Plenty of them about."

"You realize that we should be breaking practically every rule in the Metropolitan Police Code?"

"That's right."

"And if we're caught we shall both be sacked."

"That's why I'm not planning to get caught, personally," said Wilmot.

It was half an hour after midnight when they backed the little van into the passageway behind Light's yard. A veil of drizzling rain had cut down visibility to a few yards.

"Perfect night for crime," said Wilmot. "You hold the ladder. I'll go first. I think I saw some broken bottle on the top of this wall."

Petrella gave him a minute's start, then followed. Negotiated with care, the ragged *cheveux-de-frise* presented little obstacle. Petrella let himself down on the other side, and Wilmot's hand grabbed his foot and steered it on to an upended cistern.

Five minutes later they were in Jerry Light's office, carefully fastening the blanket, which Wilmot had brought with him, over the only window.

Petrella then turned on his lantern torch and stood it on the floor.

"Better get cracking," he said. "It looks like a lot of work."

One closet contained box files full of bills, invoices, and trade correspondence. Another was devoted to builder's catalogues, price lists, and samples mixed with old telephone and street directories, technical publications, and an astonishing collection of paperback novels. The desk was full of mixed correspondence and bills. The old-fashioned safe in the corner was locked.

Three hours of hard work convinced Petrella that Mr. Light had a perfectly genuine builder's business.

"There's only one thing here I don't quite understand," he said. "Why should he bother to keep a seven-year-old diary in the top left-hand drawer of his desk? Anything you kept close at hand like that, you'd expect it to be important, wouldn't you?"

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"Probably forgot to throw it away."

"But why keep a seven-year-old one, and throw away the other six?"

Wilmot came across to have a look.

"There's something else odd about it, too," said Petrella. "Do you see?"

Wilmot focused his torch on to the open book and studied it carefully.

"Doesn't seem to mean a lot," he said. "There's something written on each page. Sort of shorthand. Perhaps it's business appointments."

"That's what I thought at first. But would he have business appointments on Sunday too?"

"Doesn't seem likely," agreed Wilmot. "What are you going to do?"

"We can't take it away. If it's important, he's bound to miss it. We'll have to photograph it." He produced from his coat pocket a small black box. "We'll prop it up on the desk. Shine your torch on it, and turn each page when I say."

It took them an hour to finish the job, replace the book, and tidy up.

"If there's anything important," said Petrella, "it's in the safe. I'm afraid that's beyond us."

"You never know," said Wilmot. "I found this key in that closet. It's just the sort of place people do hide their safe keys. See if it fits."

Petrella took the key, inserted it in the lock, and exerted pressure. There was a tiny sensation of prickling in his fingers, and the key turned.

"Nice work," said Wilmot. "Let's see what he keeps in the old strongbox. Hello! What is it? Something wrong?"

Petrella had relocked the safe. Now he walked across and replaced the key in the closet. He did this without haste, but without loss of time.

"We're getting out of here," he said, "and damned quick. That safe's wired to an alarm. I set it off when I turned the key."

He picked up the torch from the floor and made a careful tour of the room. There wasn't a great deal to do. But it took time.

"All right," Petrella said at last. "When I turn out the torch, get the blanket down."

"Nick of time," said Wilmot.

They could both hear the car coming . . .

As they locked the office door behind them and went down the steps into the yard, headlights swiveled round the corner throwing the main gate into relief. Brakes screamed; a car door slammed; a voice started giving orders.

Wilmot lay across the wall, leaned down, and pulled Petrella up beside him. There was no time for finesse. Petrella heard the cloth of his trousers rip on the broken

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glass as he swung his legs across, felt a stinging pain in his thigh, and the warm rush of blood down his leg.

Then he was following Wilmot down the ladder. As he reached the ground, Wilmot's hand grabbed his arm.

Footsteps were echoing along the pavement.

Wilmot put his mouth close to Petrella's ear. "They've sent someone round the back," he said. "I'll have to fix him."

Petrella nodded. He could feel the blood running into his shoe.

Wilmot crouched, pressed against the wall. The dim form of a man appeared at the mouth of the passage and came on, unsuspecting. Wilmot straightened up, and hit him, once, from below, at the exact point where trousers and shirt joined.

The man said something which sounded like "Aaargh," and folded forward on to his knees. As Wilmot and Petrella picked their way past him, he was still fighting for breath.

"What *are* these?" said Jane Orfrey.

"They're ten-magnification enlargements of microfilm shots of the pages in a seven-year-old desk diary."

"But what do they mean?"

"If I knew that," said Petrella, "I'd know whether I risked my professional career last night for something or for nothing. I want you to go through every entry. I expect it's a code—the homemade sort that's so damned difficult to decipher—where U.J. can mean Uncle Jimmy, Ursula Jeans, *and* the Union Jack. You'll need a lot of patience with it."

Jane said, "We got something useful this morning. Do you remember Mallindales? The installment buying house. It was in answer to one of our circulars about marked and series notes."

There were two things, thought Petrella, about Jane Orfrey. The first was that she said *we* quite naturally, identifying herself as a member of the outfit. The other was that she had carried out every job she had been given without once saying, "I'm only here to type letters." He wondered, not for the first time, how they had been lucky enough to get her.

"You're not listening to a word I'm saying."

"I'm sorry," said Petrella. "We've had a lot of answers in to that particular inquiry."

"Mallindales told us they had a special stamp which they used on all their banknotes. Remember? The point about it was that it didn't appear to mark the notes at all. But if you held one of them flat, and looked across it in an oblique light, you could see the letters MD."

"I remember now," said Petrella. "They'd paid in a couple of hundred marked notes the day be-

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fore the Maritime Bank at Liverpool was broken open. They thought we might locate some of them, because the thieves wouldn't realize they were marked."

"We *have* located one. It turned up yesterday, in the possession of a character called Looey Bell. He's a small-time thief, who was picked up by the Highside police for illicit door-to-door collection."

"And this was part of the money he'd collected?"

"That's right. The only person—he says—who gave him a banknote was the local parson."

Petrella considered the matter. A clergyman who gave away pound notes to strangers who came to the door sounded like an unusual character.

"He might be worth looking into."

"Wilmot's looking into him now."

"He's cracked," reported Wilmot, when he came back after tea. "He tried to give *me* a pound. He said I looked like a very nice young man."

"Who is he?"

"The Reverend Mortleman, Vicar of St. John at Patmos, Crouch End. When I'd convinced him that I was a police officer and not a Good Cause, he spun me a yarn about a party who gave him money to give to the deserving poor. Some old girl with more money than sense, who knew Mortleman when he was an assistant clergyman at St. Barnabas, Pont Street, I gather He wouldn't tell me her name."

"That sounds plausible," said Petrella. "A lot of rich people go to St. Barnabas. One of them might be sending him money for his local charities."

"I could probably find out who it was if I made a few inquiries."

Petrella considered the matter He had to be careful not to disperse the efforts of his small force by chasing red herrings. "Let it stop there for the moment," he said. "I'll get the local boys to watch out. If they find any more of these MD notes circulating in those parts, we'll reconsider."

The next MD note arrived from quite a different source. A waiter at the Homburg-Carleton, going home in the early hours of the morning, started by accusing a taxi driver of overcharging him, then assaulted him, and finished up in custody. The Station Sergeant, checking his belongings before he was put into a cell, found three pound notes in his wallet, all marked with the Mallindales stamp, and brought them round personally to New Scotland Yard.

Petrella said, "Three of them together! That looks more like it. Where did he say he got them from?"

"He said they were his share of that evening's take."

"Then they must have come from someone dining at the Hom-

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burg. Good work, Sergeant. We'll follow it up."

Jane Orfrey spent the afternoon with the Restaurant Manager, and came back with a list of three public dinners, five private dinners, and the names of the 84 people who had actually booked tables that night.

"It's impossible to identify their guests," she said. "And there were one or two people who came in without booking."

"It's not so bad," said Petrella. "Agreed, we can't do anything about the people who didn't book. But there weren't a lot of those. And why bother about the guests? Guests charge it to their bills. As for the big dinners, it's only the organizers of those who matter. A bit more work and we can boil this down to quite a short list."

"Suppose we boil it down to twelve names," said the girl. "What do we do then? Go and ask them all if they know any bank robbers?"

Petrella looked at her curiously. "You need a break," he said. "You've been overworking."

Jane said stiffly, "It's the most interesting job I've ever done. I don't want to fall down on it, that's all."

"When we heard we were going to get a secretary," said Petrella, "I remember Wilmot said—" At this point, he remembered what Wilmot *had* said, and improvised rapidly—" 'As we're the youngest Department, we're bound to get the worst secretary.' I think we had a bit of luck there. I think we got the best."

"It's nice of you to say so."

"It must have been a slip-up in the typing pool. They'd earmarked someone like Mrs. Proctor for us, and they pulled the wrong card out of the filing cabinet."

"I don't think the typing pool had much say in the matter," said Jane. "I was posted here direct by Uncle Wilfred."

"Uncle Wilfred?"

"The Assistant Commissioner. He's my mother's elder brother."

"Good heavens," said Petrella, thinking back quickly over some of Wilmot's strictures on the top brass. "You might have told us sooner."

"You're the only person I have told," said Jane.

Petrella, looking at his watch, was surprised to see that it was nearly half-past seven. He was on the point of saying, "Let's go out and get something to eat," when it occurred to him that Jane might think he was asking her out because she was the Assistant Commissioner's niece.

He swallowed the words, and said an abrupt, "Good night."

After he had gone, Jane sat for a whole minute staring at the closed door. Then she said out loud, "Silly cuckoo. You oughtn't to have told him. Now he's clammed up again."

When Petrella arrived at Scot-

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land Yard on Monday morning, he could almost feel the thunder in the air. He went straight to Chief Superintendent Baldwin's office.

"You got my note?" said Baldwin.

"I didn't get any note," said Petrella, "but I heard the early morning news. It's not too good, is it?"

"It's damned bad," said Baldwin. "Two jobs on the same night. The Manchester one was the biggest haul yet. What was really unfortunate was that the bank knew they were vulnerable—it was one of the payoff days for the Town Centre Reconstruction—and they'd asked the police to keep a special watch."

Petrella said, "How did they get in?"

"It was clever. One thing the police were on the lookout for was empty premises, near the bank. There weren't any. Just a block of offices, all let. The people who pulled this job must have planned it six months ago. That was when they took this office, two away from the bank. They cut through the wall, crossed the intervening office after it closed on Saturday, cut through the second wall, broke into the bank itself, and opened the strongroom some time on Sunday night. No one heard them. It isn't a residential area."

"What now?"

"Now," said Baldwin grimly, "the local force, prodded by the banks, are asking us to help, and when they say help, they mean something more than research and coordination."

"What did they have in mind?"

"Two or three mobile teams of special officers, working on the lines of the murder squad."

Petrella felt cold.

"That'll be quite an organization," he said. "I suppose we should be swallowed up in it."

Seeing his face, Baldwin laughed and said, "It may never happen. But it means we've got to get results, quick. How far have you got?"

It was a question Petrella found embarrassing to answer. It seemed pompous to say, "We're still analyzing information. You can't expect results until the analysis is complete." So he said, "We've one definite line. It may lead somewhere." He explained about Jerry Light.

"Do you think he runs the whole show?"

"I don't think so, no. My guess is that he runs the heavy mob. This organization has its own Flying Squad. When a job's being done one or two of them will be on hand to get back the equipment and collect the organizer's share of the loot."

"If that's so," said Baldwin, "there must be a link between Light and the head man."

"We're working on that angle," said Petrella. He thought it wiser not to say too much about the di-

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ary, or the circumstances in which it had come into their possession. "Another way would be to trace the equipment, from the factory. It would mean going over to West Germany."

"That could be fixed," said Baldwin. "We'd need a few days to make the arrangements. You'd go yourself. Do you talk any German?"

"Enough to get on with," said Petrella, in German.

When he got back to his room, he was tackled by Sergeant Edwards, with a worried face.

"You'd hardly think," he said, "that a man with an uncommon name like Alwyn Corder could disappear off the face of the earth, would you?"

So much had happened recently that it took Petrella a moment to think who Alwyn Corder was. Then he said, "You mean the other man, the one who helped Light assault that bank manager, at Exeter."

"Yes. Corder was one of the Joint Managing Directors in a demoliation firm. Light worked for the same firm."

"Managing Director? Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. It's all in the Company Office Records. The other director was a Douglas Marchant. Marchant and Corder started the firm just after the war. It went broke in 1952. I've searched every record we possess—not only the Directories, but Electors Registers, Motor Car License lists, Passport Office lists—"

"Perhaps he's dead."

"The Register of Deaths at Somerset House was the first place I searched."

"Well," said Petrella. "Perhaps—" and got no further, because Wilmot came in like an express train.

"Guess what?" he said. And gave them no time to guess. "A third banknote's turned up, *and we've got a cross reference.*"

Three heads went up, like three nestlings offered food.

"A jobbing printer in New Cross. Luckily he used the note for a subscription to the local police charity. When they saw the mark, they took it back to him, and he said it was part of a payment he'd had that morning for a job he'd done printing the souvenir menus for a charity dinner—" Wilmot paused with considerable artistry—"at the Homburg-Carleton."

"Good work," said Petrella softly. "Which charity?"

"It's a Society which sends kids to the seaside."

Petrella turned up his list. "That's right," he said. "The S.S.H.U.C. They were having a show that night. Can't be a coincidence."

"Who was the organizer?" said Jane.

"Mrs. Constantia Velden, O.B.E."

"I'm sure I know the name.

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Doesn't she do a lot of these things? She's almost a professional organizer."

"Out of my line."

"It's in mine," said Jane. "I did a London season."

She departed.

There was a lot of checking and cross-checking to be done, and it was after six before she came back. Sergeant Edwards and Wilmot had gone home. Petrella saw, from the pink patches in her cheeks and the sparkle in her eye, that something had happened.

"I've located your woman organizer," she said. "She lives in a very nice house in St. Johns Wood, with a cook, a chauffeur and three dalmatians. Oozing with money and good works."

"What else?"

"How do you know there's something else?"

"Because you're almost bursting to tell me."

"I've a good mind not to," said Jane. "Well, all right. As a matter of fact, it didn't take very long to find out about Mrs. Velden. And it was a nice day. So I went on up to Crouch End and saw the Reverend Mortleman."

"The devil you did! What did you say?"

"I said I was Mrs. Velden's secretary, and she was a bit anxious, because he hadn't acknowledged the last lot of money she'd sent him."

Petrella stared at her.

"He was most upset. Said he was sure he had acknowledged it. He insisted on me coming in, so that he could find a carbon copy of his letter to Mrs. Velden. He did find it too. So I apologized. Then we had tea together."

When Petrella had recovered his breath he said, "You were taking a bit of a chance, weren't you? Suppose he'd known Mrs. Velden's secretary by sight."

"He couldn't have known her new one."

"Her new one?"

"She's been advertising in *The Times*. That's what gave me the idea. Couldn't I answer the advertisement?"

Before Petrella could string together some of the many ways of saying no to this outrageous proposal she hurried on.

"I don't suppose Mrs. Velden's a master criminal. She certainly doesn't sound like one. But all this money is coming *through* her. She must have some connection with the organizers. If I was working for her, and kept my eyes open, I could probably spot—"

Petrella found his voice at last. "You're not even a policewoman," he said. "You're a typist."

It wasn't, perhaps, the best way of putting it. Jane turned dark red and said, "Of all the stupid, stuffy ungrateful things to say—"

"I'm sorry . . ."

"Don't you *want* to solve this

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Don't you *want* to find out who's unning it?"

"Now you're being silly."

"At least I'm not being pom-ous."

Petrella said, "I'm sorry if I ound pompous, but what you lon't seem to realize is that I can't ossibly let you take an active part n this, without getting into fright-ul trouble with the Establish-nent." He added hastily, "It's very late, and we're both a bit tired, I xpect. Come and have something o eat."

"Thank you," said Jane, "but as a typist, I know my place." She made a dignified exit.

Petrella swore, and took a run-ning kick at the metal wastepaper asket. It rose in a neat parabola and broke a window.

Next morning Petrella made a oint of getting to the office early. He found Jane alone there, typing furiously. He selected the most pro-pitiatory of half a dozen opening gambits which he had worked out during a sleepless night.

Before he could start, Jane said, "I'm sorry I was stupid last night. Obviously you couldn't do it."

This took the wind out of Petrella's sails so effectively that he could only stare at her.

"As a matter of fact," he said at last, "I had a word with the A.C.—with your uncle, that is—and he said that, compared with some of the things you'd tried to talk him into letting you do, this sounded comparatively harmless."

"Bully for Uncle Wilfred."

"But he laid down certain conditions. First, you're to report, by telephone, to this office every night between five and seven. Use a call box, not a private telephone. Second, if ever you're going out anywhere, you're to let us know where you're going."

"It all seems a bit unnecessary to me," said Jane. "But I'll do it if you insist."

"All that remains now is for you to get the job."

"I rather think I've got it. I went round to see Mrs. Velden last night. It turned out that she knew a friend of a friend of my mother's. We got on like a house on fire." Seeing the look in Petrella's eye, she added hastily, "Of course, if you'd said no, I wouldn't have taken the job. I thought there was no harm in seeing if I could get it. And I'll remember to telephone you every night."

"It won't be me for the next few nights," said Petrella. "I'm off to Germany."

The Baron von der Hulde und Oberath propelled a cedarwood cabinet of king-sized cigars across the top of his desk toward Petrella, helped himself to one, lit both of them with a long match, and picked up the photograph again.

"Certainly this is one of our

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drills," he said. "What can I tell you about it."

"How long has it been in production?"

"Five years. A little more."

"And in that time how many would you have exported to England?"

"I should have to consult my records. Perhaps a hundred." Petrella's heart sank.

"It is a highly efficient drill," said the Baron. "I sent half a dozen the other day to one of your Safe Deposits."

"Safe Deposits?"

"A good Safe Deposit only possesses one key for each of its safes. If the depositor loses it, the safe has to be broken open. The screws of the hinges have to be drilled out —but it takes an exceptionally good drill to do it. Any ordinary one would break, or melt. A number of cooling devices had been tried before. None successfully. Then we invented this method. It is so very simple. As the drill gets hotter, it sweats. Just like the human body. It exudes its own lubricant. We call it 'film cooling.'"

"I see," said Petrella. "And no one else but you makes these drills?"

"We have the world patent."

"Then you could compile, from your records, a list of people in England whom you have supplied?"

"I could no doubt do so, but it might take a couple of days."

"It'll be worth waiting for."

"When the list is ready I will telephone your hotel. The Goldene Kreuz, isn't it? Take another cigar with you, please. You can smoke it this evening."

Petrella spent the afternoon exploring Dortmund, mostly from the top of a tram. It seemed to him an unattractive city. At seven o'clock he got back to his hotel, and had a bath. Then he set out to have a look at the night life.

First, he stood himself a large and rather heavy, meal at the Bar berina. Then he moved on to one of the many beer cellars in the Augusta Platz and ordered a stein of what described itself as the world famous Munchner Lowenbrau which tasted no better and no worse than any lager beer he had drunk in an English pub.

On the wall opposite was an advertisement, depicting a man with a monocle smoking a cigar. It looked like a stylized version of the Baron von der Hulde und Oberath. As this thought occurred to him, another one crossed his mind and he put down his beer slowly.

The Baron had said, "I will telephone your hotel—the Goldene Kreuz." How did he know which hotel to telephone? Petrella had certainly not told him.

He went back, very carefully over the events of the morning. He had driven straight from the airport to the headquarters of the City Police, to check in with Inspector

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Laufer, a contact arranged for him by Baldy. The Inspector had given him the names of the possible manufacturers of drills, of which the Baron had been the largest and the most likely.

Might the Inspector have telephoned the Baron, to tell him Petrella was coming, and might he have mentioned the name of his hotel?

No. That was impossible. For the simple reason that Petrella had not, at that time, chosen a hotel. He had gone to the Goldenes Kreuz after leaving the police station.

It was at this point that his thoughts became linked with a suspicion which had never been quite out of his mind since he had left the hotel.

He was being followed.

It was impossible to say how he knew, but now that he gave his mind to it, he was quite certain. In London the discovery would not have worried him. Here, in a foreign country, in a strange city, it was less agreeable.

His first idea was to telephone Inspector Laufer, but he dismissed it as soon as he thought of it. There was no explanation he could make which would not sound ludicrous. Dortmund might not be beautiful, but it was a well-organized modern city, with an efficient police force, and well-lit streets. All he had to do was to walk back to his hotel, go up to his room, bolt the door on the inside, and go to bed.

He paid his bill, recovered his coat and hat, and climbed the steps which led up to the street.

A storm of rain had cleared the air and emptied the streets. He stepped out briskly. No one seemed to be taking the least interest in him. Halfway down the Augusta Platz he had to turn right, into the smaller street which would, in turn, bring him to the Station Square.

It was at this moment that he heard the car start off behind him. Something in the note of the engine sounded a warning. He jerked his head round, and saw the car coming, straight at him.

Without stopping to think, he jerked himself to one side, spotted a narrow side street ahead, and ran down it. It was when he heard the car going into reverse that he realized his mistake. He should have stuck to the main street.

The side street stretched ahead of him, badly lit, absolutely empty, sloping steeply downhill. Behind him, the headlamps of the car flicked on, pinning him.

He reckoned he had a good twenty yards start. On his left stretched the unbroken wall of a large building; no entrance, not even a recess. The right-hand side was blocked by a high iron railing.

He put on speed. There was a T junction at the bottom, and what looked like a rather better-lighted

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road. He swung round the corner. The car, which had been catching up, cornered behind him.

Petrella sidestepped. His plan was to turn in his tracks, and run in the opposite direction before the car could turn. He had reckoned without the driver. As he sidestepped, the car swerved too. The wing caught him in the small of the back, scooped him up, and tossed him against the fence which bordered the road.

The car screamed to a halt, and went into reverse.

Petrella was lying at the inner edge of the pavement, close to the fence. There was a stabbing pain in his chest, and he seemed to have lost the use of his legs.

He could see the driver now, with his head out of the side window. He had a heavy, white, bad-tempered face.

As he watched, the driver maneuvered the near-side wheels of his car carefully up on to the pavement, judged the distance to where Petrella lay, and started to reverse.

When he's been over me once, thought Petrella, he'll come back again just to make sure. Petrella's legs were like sacks of sand, but he still had the use of his arms. Pressing on the pavement, he rolled himself over, and then over again until he was pressed hard against the bottom of the wooden fence.

It was no use. The car was on him now. The near-side wheels were going over him.

Petrella heaved wildly, felt the skirting board at the foot of the fence bend, and heaved again. There was a dull crack. A complete length of board gave way, and Petrella went rolling, over and over, down a grassy bank to come to rest with a thud at the bottom.

He was on gravel. His groping hand found a wire, and he hauled himself up on his knees. The fall had done something for his legs, which were now hurting as much as his chest; but they seemed to be answering signals again. He crawled forward, pulling himself by the wire.

The fence rocked and splintered as his pursuers, too bulky to squeeze through the space underneath, battered it down.

Petrella crawled faster.

Behind him he heard the fence go down with a crack.

There was a circular opening on the left. It looked like a drain. He crawled into it, until a bend in the pipe forced him to stop. Footsteps thundered past. Men were shouting. There was a rumbling, thudding noise, which shook the ground; a hiss of steam, and the clanking of iron on iron.

For the first time he realized that he was on a railway line. The wire he had been following must have been a signal wire. What he was in now was some sort of rainwater conduit. There was plenty of water coming down it, too.

More voices, angry voices. Of-

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ficial voices. A dog barking.

Petrella pushed himself backward until he was out in the open again. Some way up the line an argument was going on. Orders were being shouted in loud, angry German.

Petrella propped himself against the bank, and started massaging the life back into his sodden legs. A dog slipped out of the darkness, and stood watching him.

"Good boy," said Petrella hopefully. The dog gave a sharp bark, like a Sergeant-major calling the parade to attention.

Two men appeared. They were in the green uniform of the railway police. As soon as they saw him, both of them started to shout.

When they seemed to have finished, Petrella said in impeccable German, "Conduct me, at once, if you please, to Inspector Laufer, of the Municipal Police."

Even the dog seemed impressed by this.

Constantia Velden was a compulsive talker. She didn't really need a secretary, Jane Orfrey decided. What she needed was a captive audience. And Jane, for two whole days, had been it.

There were advantages, of course. Within an hour, and without any actual effort on her part, she had learned almost all there was to know about Constantia; about her late husband, who had been an administrative officer in the Air Force, and had died of hepatitic jaundice in 1955; about her brother, Douglas, a Wing Commander, D.S.O., D.F.C., now the managing director of a firm manufacturing window frames, with a London office in Lennox Street; about Constantia's charitable enterprises; about the time Constantia had shaken hands with the Queen; about life; about money.

Money seemed to come into most of Mrs. Velden's calculations. Reading between the lines, Jane deduced that she had inherited a reasonable competence from her late husband, and that she was helped out, where necessary, by her brother. He advised her on her investments and looked after her tax. He had also brought Alex into the picture, and probably paid his salary as well.

Alex was the only other resident at the Loudon Road house, and was chauffeur, butler, gardener, and footman combined. A husky, brown-haired, freckled boy, who looked no more than sixteen and was in fact in his early twenties. He did everything that was beyond the strength or capacity of Mrs. Velden and her cohort of daily women. What spare time Alex had, he spent polishing his employer's car and tuning up his own motorcycle.

He was out with her now. A lunch date with brother Douglas, she gathered. Jane munched her way through a solitary meal, and

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wondered, for the twentieth time, what possible connection her talkative, middle-aged employer could have with an organization which had made bank robbery a fine art. Her faith told her that the connection was there. After 48 hours, her reason was beginning to doubt it.

It was three o'clock before the car reappeared in Loudon Road and Alex jumped out and held the door open for Mrs. Velden. Jane caught a glimpse of her, and of the man who followed her out. So Douglas had accompanied his sister home. Interesting.

Then the drawing-room door opened, and he came in, holding it open for his sister and closing it behind her.

He was a man of about six foot, with the round shoulders and barrel chest of a boxer; thick black hair, graying round the edges; a face dominated by a long straight nose which turned out, suddenly, at the end, over a bush of gray mustache. Like a downpipe, she thought, emptying into a clump of weeds. A disillusioned pair of eyes peered out from under thick black eyebrows.

"Wing Commander Marchant, Jane Orfrey."

"Plain Douglas Marchant, if you don't mind," said the man. "You're my sister's new secretary. Has she driven you mad yet?"

"Really, Douglas . . ."

"If she hasn't, she will. She goes through secretaries at the rate of two a week. She's a Gorgon. She doesn't realize that the days of indentured labor are over. There are more jobs than secretaries. Girls please themselves. Isn't that right?"

"More or less," said Jane.

"As soon as you present yourself to an agency they offer you a dozen jobs, and say, Take your pick."

"It isn't quite as easy as that."

"What agency do you use, by the way?"

It came out so swiftly that Jane gaped for a moment, and said, "As a matter of fact, I got this job through an advertisement."

"But you must have an agency," said Douglas gently. "You'll never get properly paid if you don't."

"Really, Douglas," said Constantia. "Are you trying to lure her away?"

"I don't see why not. I don't mind betting you underpay her."

"Perhaps she doesn't want to work in an office."

"I think it would be terribly dull," said Jane.

"You wouldn't be dull in my office," said Douglas. "Eighteen pounds a week, and luncheon vouchers."

Jane felt it was time she asserted herself. "If I had to work in an office," she said, "I'd choose a professional office, I think. Not a commercial one."

"There, if I may say so, you display your ignorance," said Douglas. "Professional men overwork their staff and underpay them.

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They operate on too small a scale to do anything else. We're just the opposite. We've got factories all over England. There's hardly a building goes up that hasn't got our windows in it."

"You may be right," said Jane. "But personally I find businessmen so boring. They think and talk of nothing but money."

"What businessmen have you worked for," inquired Douglas politely.

Damn, thought Jane. I walked into that one. Better watch out. He's a lot cleverer than he looks.

"Two or three," she said. And to Constantia, "Should I see if we can raise a cup of tea?"

"Not for me," said Douglas. "I've got to be off. A bit of money grubbing to do. I'll get Alex to drive me back into Town, if you don't mind."

Jane telephoned Sergeant Wilmot at six o'clock that evening, from a call box on Hampstead Heath. "This is urgent," she said. "See what you can find out about Douglas Marchant. Ex-R.A.F. Runs a business which makes windows. Not widows—windows. It's got a head office in Lennox Street, and factories all over the place"

"Wasn't he the other director in the firm Light worked for, just after the war?"

"That's right. And he's Mrs. Velden's brother. He gives her money. Any banknotes she's been passing could easily have come from him."

"I suppose they could have."

She could hear the doubt in Wilmot's voice, and said urgently, "We're looking for a man who *could* run a show like this. Well, I'm telling you, Douglas Marchant fills the bill. I can't explain it all over the telephone. But he's big enough and bad enough—"

"A big bad wolf," said Wilmot. "Okay, I'll take your word for it. We'll certainly have him checked up."

"Any news from Germany?"

"Not a word," said Wilmot.

As Jane came out of the telephone booth she heard a motorcycle start up and move off. When she got back the house was in darkness, and she let herself in with her own key, and went into the drawing room.

She felt restless and uneasy, and had no difficulty in putting her finger on the cause of it. The powerful and unpleasant personality of Douglas Marchant seemed to linger in the room, like the smell of a cigar long after its owner had departed. She realized that it was the first time she had been alone in the house.

Leaving the light on in the drawing room, she went along to what Constantia called her business room at the end of the hall. Her objective was Constantia's desk. She found that all the drawers in it were locked, so was the filing cabinet, and so were the closets

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under the bookcases which lined one wall. The books in the shelves were mostly political and military history, and this surprised her, until it occurred to her that they probably represented the departed Mr. Velden's taste rather than Constantia's.

She took down one of the six volumes of Lloyd George's *War Memoirs,* blew the dust off the top, and opened it.

From an ornate bookplate the name jumped out at her—ALWYN CORDER.

Jane stared at it in blank disbelief. Then she started taking down books at random. The bookplate was in most of them. For a moment she was unable to think straight. She knew that she had stumbled on something desperately important.

A slight sound at the door made her swing around. Alex was smiling at her. "Looking for something to read?" he said.

Sergeant Edwards said to Wilmot, "It's a big company. Douglas Marchant is the chairman. Leaves most of the work to his staff, and comes up twice a week from the country to justify his director's fees."

"Anything known?"

"As far as Records know, the company and Marchant are both as clean as two proverbial whistles. What have we got on them?"

"What we've got," said Wilmot, "is a woman's instinct. Jane doesn't like his smell. She thinks he's a bad one."

"It doesn't seem a lot to go on," said Edwards doubtfully. "When's Petrella coming back?"

"Baldy hasn't heard a chirrup out of him for twenty-four hours," said Wilmot. "If you ask me, he's found himself a Rhinemaiden."

It was after midnight when the bedside telephone rang. The redheaded girl, who had been sharing Douglas Marchant's flat, and bed, for the past month, groaned and said, "Don't take any notice, Doug. It's probably a wrong number."

"Hand it over," said Douglas, who was lying on his back beside her. He balanced the instrument on his stomach and unhooked the receiver. As soon as he heard the voice at the other end he cupped a hand over the receiver and said, "Out you get, honey. It's business."

"This is a nice time to do business."

"Get up and get us both a cup of tea."

Not until the girl had grumbled her way into a dressing gown and out of the room did Douglas remove his hand from the receiver and say, "Sorry, Alex, there was someone here. It's all right now. Go ahead."

His pajama top was unbuttoned, showing a chest fuzzed with graying black hair. One of his thick hands held the telephone. The oth-

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er was fumbling on the bedside table for a cigarette. His face was expressionless.

At the end he said, "Let's see if I've got this straight. Each of the three evenings she's been there, she's been out about the same time and made a call from a public phone booth. And this evening you found her in the library, snooping through a lot of books which had the old bookplates still in them. Damn, damn, *and damn.*"

There was a long silence as if each was waiting for the other to speak.

Then Douglas said, "If she's what we think she is, and if she's got a regular reporting time, she won't pass any of this on until six o'clock tomorrow night. We ought to do something about it before then, I think."

Alex said, "Yes. I think we ought."

"I can't attend to it myself. I'm flying over to Germany tomorrow afternoon. There's been some trouble at the factory. Could you think of an excuse to take her out in the car?"

Alex said, "Suppose I said I had left some papers at the office which had to be taken to the airport—and you had a message for your sister—something like that."

"It's worth trying," said Douglas.

"When I get her in the car—what then?"

"My dear Alex, I must leave all the arrangements to you. A moonlight picnic, perhaps."

As he rang off, the red-haired girl came back with two cups of tea. Douglas drank his slowly. He didn't seem to want to talk. The red-headed girl thought that Douglas, though a generous spender, was a tiny bit odd, and had been becoming odder just lately.

Now the look in his eyes frightened her. At the age of 25 she was something of an expert on men, and she made up her mind, there and then, to clear out while Douglas was in Germany—and not to come back.

When, late the following afternoon, Alex told Jane that he had to collect some papers and take them to the airport, and that Marchant had asked that she should go too so that he could give her a message for his sister, her first reaction was to say no. Then she reflected that no harm could really be planned on the crowded roads between Central London and London Airport.

"I'll have to ask Mrs. Velden," she said.

"I've asked her. She says the trip'll do you good."

"When do we start?"

"Right now."

"I'll have to get a coat," said Jane.

She ran up to her room and stood listening. The house was quiet. She tiptoed across the corridor and into Mrs. Velden's bed-

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room. As she had hoped, there was a bedside telephone extension. She grabbed the receiver, and dialed the special number which she knew by heart.

"Hello," said Wilmot's voice. "What's up?"

"No time to explain," said Jane. "Alex is taking me, in Mrs. Velden's car, to London Airport. We're calling at the Lennox Street office first. Can you put a tail on?"

"Can do," said Wilmot. "But why—"

He found himself talking to a dead telephone. Jane had gone.

It was half-past five by the time they reached Lennox Street. While Alex was inside, Jane looked cautiously round to see if Wilmot had been as good as his word. She could see a small green van, apparently delivering parcels at the far end of the road, but nothing else.

By six o'clock, with dusk coming up, they were across Kew Bridge, and had joined the tail end of the home-going traffic on the Twickenham Road.

"Quicker this way," said Alex, "until they've finished messing about with the flyover on the Great West Road. Trouble is, everyone else knows it too. Let's try a short cut."

He swung expertly across the traffic and turned into a long road of neat houses, with neat gardens and neat cars in neat garages. At the far end of the road the street lamps petered out and they came to a halt in an area of empty lots and high fences.

"It's a dead end," said Jane.

"Not the last time I came here, it wasn't," said Alex. "Let's have a squint at the map. It's in the pocket."

As he leaned over her, she felt the needle go into her arm. For a moment she thought it was an accident—that a loose pin in Alex's coat might have stuck into her. Then she realized what had happened, and started to fight, but Alex was lying half on top of her, his thick leather driving glove feeling for her mouth.

A minute later the boy sat back in his seat, and relaxed cautiously. He had given her a full shot of pelandramine. She'd be out for an hour, and dopey for another hour after that. So there was no hurry.

He looked at himself in the driving mirror; and was pleased with the unexcited face that looked back. He stripped off the driving gloves and felt his own pulse, timing it with his wrist watch. 84. Twelve faster than it should be, but not bad. He took out a comb and ran it through his hair.

Then he examined the girl. Her mouth was open and she was breathing noisily. Her cheeks were flushed. Anyone looking at her would think that she'd been drinking too much, and had passed out. Just the ticket.

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He felt in the right-hand door-pocket and took out a small bottle of gin. A few drops round her mouth and chin. A little on her dress. Enough for people to smell it, if he was stopped.

He opened the door. There was no one in sight. He threw the gin bottle and the empty hypodermic syringe over the fence, got back, turned the car, and drove off slowly the way he had come.

The mist was thicker. At the Slough roundabout he took the Staines road, driving carefully now. He crossed Staines Bridge, following the Egham Road. At Egham the road forked. The main road, with its string of garages, its traffic and its orange neon lighting, went away to the left. The right fork, a much smaller road, followed the river toward Windsor. In summer this road too would be crowded with traffic heading for the open spaces of Runnymede Meadow. Now, on a damp February night, it was empty.

Half a mile along, Alex turned out his headlights and drove very carefully off the road and onto the rough grass. There was some danger of getting the car bogged down, but his town-and-country studded tires would grip most surfaces. There was a worse danger. Somewhere ahead was the Thames, its bank unprotected by any fence.

Alex stopped the car, got out, and walked forward, counting his paces. It was fifty yards to the bank. He came back, climbed in, and drove the car forward cautiously in low gear.

When he stopped again, he was only five yards from the edge. At this point, where the bank curved, it had been reinforced with concrete bags against the sweep of the winter floods. A yard below his feet, the river ran, cold, gray, and sleek.

Alex walked back to the car. Jane had slumped over sideways, so that when he opened the door she nearly fell out. He got his hands under her body and lifted her onto the wet grass.

Alone, islanded by the mist, touching the girl's body, moving it, arranging it, gave him a sense of power, near to exultation. He crouched beside her for a full minute to let the singing noise in his ears die down and the lights stop flashing in front of his eyes. Then he got up slowly, went round to the back of the car, opened the trunk compartment and took out two fourteen-pound weights and a coil of odd-looking plaited cord.

With the cord he tied Jane's wrists together in front of her, passing the ends through the handles of the weights and knotting them.

When he stood up, he saw three pairs of yellow eyes looking at him through the mist. He thought, for a moment, that it was his imagination playing him tricks again. Then he heard the engines, growling to themselves, as the cars bumped

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across the grass in low gear, closing in on him from every side.

He bent quickly, hoisted the girl onto his shoulders, and walked to the bank.

A man's voice shouted urgently, and an orange spotlight flicked on.

Alex humped his powerful shoulders, threw the girl ahead of him into the water, and jumped after her. While he was still in mid-air, a second body flashed past him.

Jane came up out of a tangle of nightmare, of darkness and cold, of lights and noises, into the reality of a hospital bed. The sun was slanting through the uncurtained window, and Sergeant Wilmot was perched on a chair beside her.

"Good morning," he said. "Are you ready to talk?"

"I'm all right," said Jane. "I'll get dressed, if you can find my clothes."

"The doctor says he'll let you out in a day or two, if you're good. Let's have the story."

She told him what she could remember, and Sergeant Wilmot wrote it down in his round, schoolboy hand.

"I felt the needle go in my arm," she said. "I don't really know what happened after that."

"Alex took you in the car to Runnymede, and pitched you into the river. Having first tied a couple of weights onto you. I wonder how many of his girl friends he's got rid of that way before?" He pulled a length of cord out of his pocket. "Simple, but you've got to hand it to him. It's clever. It's made of paper. Twenty or thirty separate strands of it, plaited tight together. Strong enough—but it'd melt after you'd been a day or two in the water."

Jane shuddered uncontrollably, and Sergeant Wilmot said, "I never had much tact," and put the cord away.

"Who pulled me out?"

"I did," said Wilmot. "It's the sort of thing you sometimes get a medal for. We were behind you all the way. If it hadn't been for the fog and the mess up on Staines Bridge we'd have been close enough to stop you going in the water."

"What's happened to Alex?"

"He's in the hospital at the Scrubs. In a private room. And that's where he's going to stay until Patrick gets back."

"Haven't we heard anything yet?"

"He's been off the air for nearly forty-eight hours. He'll turn up. Don't worry."

"Who said I was worrying?"

"You looked worried. Just for a moment."

Jane laughed and said, "If I'm going to be kept here, you can do something for me. Get me those photo-copies of the diary pages, and a classified directory of London. I've had a hunch and I want to work it out."

When Wilmot had gone, she stretched luxuriously, and then set-

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tled down into the warm bed. She liked the way Wilmot called Petrella, Patrick; and she wondered if she'd ever be able to do it herself. A minute later, she was asleep . . .

At eleven o'clock on the following morning the door of her room opened. Jane, who was deep in a Street Directory, her bed covered with slips of paper, said, "Put it down on the table, could you, nurse —" looked up, and saw that it was Petrella.

"Hello," she said.

"As soon as my back's turned," said Petrella, "you have to go and do a damn silly thing like that."

"Listen who's talking," said Jane. "What have *you* been up to? And what's wrong with your leg?"

"Someone tried to run me over. I rolled down a bank onto a railway."

"Well, I fell into a river. That's not much worse."

They both laughed. Petrella sat down on the end of the bed, and said, "You know why they had to shut your mouth, don't you."

"Something about those books. I couldn't work it out."

"Listen, and I'll tell you. In 1951 two men were sentenced at the Exeter Assizes for assaulting a bank manager. One was our friend Jerry Light of Islington. The other was one of the managing directors of the demolition firm he worked for. A man called Alwyn Corder, who disappeared so completely that even Sergeant Edwards couldn't trace him. Because the simple explanation eluded us all. When Corder came out of prison, *he changed his name to Velden*. All legal and aboveboard, by deed poll, registered in the High Court. I checked it this morning. And in that name, he married Constantia Marchant, Douglas Marchant's sister. It was a business alliance. Douglas was his fellow director in the demolition firm."

"I see," said Jane. "Yes, I see." A lot of tiny pieces were falling into place, and a certain pattern was appearing.

"There's a lot that isn't clear yet," said Petrella. "But the outline's there. Douglas Marchant, and Alwyn Corder, his brother-in-law, now known as Kenneth Velden, and their old foreman, Jerry Light, are the three people who started this racket, and ran it. That's for sure. Then Velden died. The other two couldn't simply hang on to his share. They paid it over to his widow."

"Then Douglas *is* head of the whole affair?"

"It's got to be proved."

"And it would help to prove it if you could show that he was still keeping in touch with Jerry Light?"

Petrella grinned, and said, "Cough it up."

"Cough *what* up?"

"Whatever it is you've discovered."

"All right. It's this diary you

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found in Light's desk. The entries are meeting places—they're pubs. *Rsg Sn* is the Rising Sun. *Wdmn* is the Woodman, and so on. The letter and numbers after the pub are the postal district, and the last number's the time of day. That's what first made me think they must be pubs, because the times are all between eleven and two, or six and ten."

Petrella got up, and stood for a long moment staring down her.

Then he said, "That's very good indeed," limped across to the door, and went quietly out, shutting the door behind him.

"Douglas Marchant," said Petrella to Baldwin, "makes windows. The windows go into new buildings all over England. In nearly all big building projects the subcontractors get paid on the same day in the month. Therefore there must be a lot of money in the main contractors' bank the day before. That's how the intelligence system works. When the bank has been chosen, a gang of specialist safebreakers do the actual work. Jerry Light gives them their instructions, and their kit. And his men collect the appropriate rake-off after the job's over. That's what the Franks brothers were waiting for, in Slough, that morning."

"How are we going to prove all this?"

"If we could get one of Jerry Light's boys to sing, he *might* give us Light. *If* we hooked Light, he *might* give us Marchant."

"You don't sound very hopeful."

"They're going to be a tough bunch to drive that sort of wedge into. They've been working together too long, and they know each other too well."

"Have you any better ideas?"

"Yes," said Petrella slowly. "I have an idea, but it's so irregular that we're going to need all the backing the A.C. can give us. First, I want Jerry Light's phone tapped."

Baldwin made a face. "You know what they think about that, don't you. Anything else?"

"That's just a start," said Petrella. "The next really is a bit hot. Now, listen—"

At London Airport the loudspeaker in the Arrival Lounge said, "We have a message for Mr. Douglas Marchant, believed to be traveling from Dortmund. Would Mr. Marchant report to the reception desk."

Douglas hesitated for a long moment.

If things really had started to happen, might it not be wisest to turn straight round and take the next airplane back to Germany?

He rejected the idea as soon as it occurred to him. It was by abandoning careful, prearranged plans and acting on the impulse of blind panic that people gave themselves away and got caught. He marched

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firmly up to the reception desk and smiled at the girl behind it.

He produced his passport. "I understand you have a message for me."

"Mr. Douglas Marchant? Would you telephone this number? You can use the telephone in the office, if you wish."

"Thank you," said Douglas. He dialed the number, which he recognized as his sister, Constantia's.

"Douglas. Thank heavens, you're back. I didn't know where to get hold of you, so I had to leave a message at the Airport."

"What's happened?"

"Alex and Jane Orfrey have both disappeared. And they've taken the car with them."

"When did this happen?"

"Two nights ago. I've been so worried."

"You've told the police."

"Of course. But they've done nothing. They even suggested—" Douglas heard his sister choke—"that they might have eloped together."

"I suppose it's possible."

"Don't be absurd. Alex was a chauffeur—a mechanic—"

"And Jane was your secretary."

"That's different. She was a girl of good family."

Douglas was about to say something flippant, when he realized that his sister was upset; and being upset, might do something stupid.

"I'll make some inquiries," he said. "I'll ring you back as soon as I have any news for you."

As soon as he had rung off, he dialed another number. The girl who answered the telephone said, "Who's that? Mr. Wilberforce. I'll see if Mr. Simmons is in." And a few seconds later, "No, I'm sorry. He's just gone out. Can I get him to ring you back?"

"Don't bother," said Douglas. "When he does come back, would you give him a message. Tell him that I got the letter he sent me on the third of March."

"Right char," said the girl.

As soon as she had rung off, she walked through to the inner office, and said, "That was Mr. Wilberforce, Mr. Simmons. You did say you weren't in if he telephoned."

"That's what I said," agreed Mr. Simmons, a short, sharp-looking man in thick bifocals. "And that's what I meant. Did he leave a message?"

"He just said that he got the letter you sent on the third of March."

"You're sure he said the third of March."

"I'm not deaf yet," said the girl.

"All right," said Mr. Simmons. "Plug a line through to this telephone, and you can go to lunch."

" 'Tisn't lunchtime."

"Then go and buy yourself a new hat."

Mr. Simmons listened until he heard the outer door shut, drew the telephone toward himself, and dialed an Islington number.

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Jerry Light, who answered the telephone, said, "You're sure it was the third of March he said? All right. Thanks very much," and rang off. He opened the drawer of his desk, extracted the diary that lay there, and opened it at the first week in March.

Then he looked at his watch. It was just after twelve. He crammed a hat on his head, went down the outside staircase into the yard, said, "Watch things, Sammy. I'm going out," to the shaggy young man who was sawing a length of timber, and set off at a brisk pace. He seemed to be walking haphazardly, choosing small empty streets. But his course was steadily northeast.

One o'clock was striking when he went through the door of a small public house in the neighborhood of Hackney Downs, said, "Wotcher, Len," to the landlord, and walked through the serving area into the private room behind.

Douglas Marchant was sitting in front of the fire, nursing a glass of whiskey. He indicated another glass, ready poured, which stood on the table.

Light said, "Ta," took a drink and added, "I take it you saw the news."

"That's why I came back from Germany. All that the papers said was that Alex got out of the hospital at the Scrubs yesterday morning and clean away. No details. It mightn't be true."

"It's true all right," said Light. "He telephoned me this morning."

Marchant's lip went up. "At your place?"

"No. He had sense enough not to do that. He got me through Shady Simmons."

"Did he tell you how he got picked up?"

"He thinks it was just bad luck. A police patrol car spotted him tipping the girl into the river."

"I don't believe in bad luck like that," said Marchant. "Do you?"

"Not really," said Light. "I think they're moving in on us."

"What did Alex want?"

"A place to hide out in. He spent last night on the Embankment. And for you to get him out of the country."

"Or what?"

"So far, he's kept his mouth shut. If he did decide to talk, he could tell them a hell of a lot they want to know."

Marchant drank a little more whiskey. "We'll have to do something about him," he said. "The only place he'd be safe would be in East Germany."

"I can think of somewhere that'd be a damned sight safer," said Jerry.

A red coal dropped from the fire. The clock on the mantelshelf ticked. In the bar, Douglas could hear the landlord saying, "Nice sort of day for March," He had said it to every customer who came in.

Douglas finished his drink and got up. He said, "I think you're right. We're going to pack up this

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ark soon. We don't want any loose nds. I've got to go and hold my ister's hand—she's having hysterics. We'll go out the back way."

As the two men emerged from he alleyway, a girl approached hem. She had a collector's tray of ittle red and white flowers. "For he Cottage Hospital," she said. She vas a nice-looking girl. Douglas elt in his pocket, found half a rown, dropped it in her tin, and aid, "Keep the flower. You can sell t again."

The girl said, "Thank you, sir." Douglas noticed that she had an utsize flower with a black center inned onto the shoulder of her ress.

At nine o'clock that night Jerry ight left his flat in Albany Street nd walked to the garage where he arked his car. The attendant said, She ought to be all right now."

In the act of getting into the car, ight paused, "What do you mean, ow?"

"Now the distributor head's been xed."

"I didn't tell you to do that."

"It wasn't us. The man came ound from the makers with it. He xed it himself."

"Oh," said Light. "Yes. Of course. d forgotten about that. He fixed , did he? Come to think of it, I on't be needing the car just now. 've changed my mind."

He left the garage, hailed a taxi, nd was driven through Regent's Park to Clarence Gate. Here he dismissed the taxi. Five minutes quick walk brought him to a row of garages in a cul-de-sac behind Baker Street station.

Light was tolerably sure that no one knew about his second car. It was a new M.G. Magnette, with a capacious trunk compartment in which he had stored two bulging suitcases and a carry-all. He had rented the garage in another name, had installed the car in it three months before, and had not visited it since.

The only trouble was that it was now raining so hard that it was difficult to keep observation as he walked. He didn't think anyone was following him, but was not quite sure.

He backed the car out and drove slowly into the park, which he proceeded to circle twice. Headlights showed, blurred by the rain, in his mirror. Cars overtook him. Cars passed him. At the end of the second circuit he was reasonably happy, turned out of the park at Gloucester Gate, and headed north.

"He's making it damned difficult for us," said Wilmot into his car wireless. "I wish he'd used his first car. I'd got that fixed nicely. All we'd have had to do then would be sit back and track him on the radio repeater. Over."

"Count your blessings," said Petrella into his wireless. "If it wasn't raining so damned hard, he'd prob-

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ably have spotted us long ago. Over and out."

Jerry Light drove steadily up Highgate Hill, across the North Circular Road, and on toward Barnet. His plan was very simple. He was not a believer in elaboration. His instructions to Alex had been to come by Underground to High Barnet and then to walk out onto the main North Road and along it for a quarter of a mile, past the Golf Course, timing himself to get to the point where the road forked by eleven o'clock. Alex was to come alone, and make damned sure he wasn't followed.

Light looked at his watch. He was in nice time. Five minutes to eleven, and that was High Barnet station on the right. The rain was coming down like steel rods. Alex must be getting very wet.

Light followed the main road past the Elstree fork. There was very little traffic. A couple of London-bound cars came toward him over the long swell of the hill. There was nothing behind him as far as he could see.

His headlights picked out Alex standing by the roadside.

Light crawled to a stop beside him. Leaning across, he turned down the far side window. He used his left hand to do this. His right hand was resting on the floor of the car.

"That you, Jerry," said Alex. "I'm damned wet."

"It's me," said Light. He brought up his right hand, and shot Alex twice through the chest at point blank range.

Alex jerked back on to his heels went down to his knees, and fell forward, his face in the water which was cascading down the gutter.

Resting his forearm on the ledge of the window, Light took careful aim, and shot again.

The repeated detonations had deafened him, and he could hear nothing. The first thing he noticed was that headlights, backed by a powerful spotlight, had come on behind him. He slammed the car into gear, almost lifting it off the ground as he drove it forward.

A siren sounded.

The car behind him was almost on top of him. Light saw, out of the corner of his eye, a minor road to the left, swerved sharply, and went into a skid.

On a dry surface it would have come off, but the wet macadam was like ice. Instead of correcting at the end of the skid, the car swung wildly out of control, went through the fence, wires twanging like harp strings, turned, once, right over and smacked into the concrete base of a pylon, dislocating two of the overhead lines and plunging half of High Barnet into darkness and confusion.

So Petrella came for a second time into the presence of Assistant

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Commissioner Romer, and came with the consciousness of failure heavy on him.

"I reckoned," he said, "that if we let Alex go, they'd be in a cleft stick. Either they left him in the lurch, in which case he'd split. Or they helped him, and we caught them red-handed. Now Alex is dead, and Light's dead, and we're further off than ever from proving any connection between the crooks who do the work, and the man at the top, who draws the big profits."

"Douglas Marchant?"

"Yes, sir. I've no doubt in my own mind that he's the man who founded the organization, and who runs it."

"It's not just what's in your mind," said Romer. "There's a good deal of concrete evidence, too. That was a nice photograph our girl collector with the flowers got of him, talking to Light, outside the pub."

"He could explain that, sir. He's in windows. Light's a builder. It could have been an ordinary business chat."

"Light's a criminal," said Romer, "a man who committed a cold-blooded murder a few hours after meeting Marchant secretly at an out-of-the-way public house. I don't doubt that he could explain the coincidence. Most things can be explained, if you try hard enough. Here's another one. Two days ago, Marchant went across to Germany. He visited your old friend, the Baron von der Hulde und Oberath. They had a long talk. The German police have got a man in the packing department. He saw Marchant coming and going, and is prepared to identify him. Last night there was a fire at the factory."

"A fire!"

"Nothing serious. It broke out in the dispatch department, and destroyed all records of dispatches during the last five years."

"I see," said Petrella.

"It's particularly intriguing because our man remembers, four or five days ago, helping to pack and dispatch a drill—to a place called Fyledean Court, near Lavenham, in Wiltshire."

"Did you say a *drill*, sir?"

"Curb your excitement. It wasn't a drill for drilling holes in metal plates. It was a drill for planting seed potatoes. Curious, all the same, that the dispatch records should have been destroyed immediately afterwards."

"It's going to be even more difficult to prove anything now."

"There's one rule I always follow," said Romer. "When you get a smack in the eye, don't sit down. Get up and counterattack at once. I spoke to the Chief Constable of Wiltshire before you came in. He's promised to cooperate with you in every way."

"Cooperate in what, sir?" said Petrella blankly.

"You're going down with the search warrant which I've secured

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for you, and you're going to turn Fyledean Court upside down."

"But—" said Petrella.

"But what, Inspector?"

"If I *don't* find anything, isn't there going to be the most awful row?"

"I'm prepared to accept that risk," said Romer coldly. "He shouldn't have tried to have my niece drowned. I'm rather fond of her."

Petrella drove, while Wilmot read the map.

"We'll go down to Christchurch first," he said.

"I thought we were going to Lavenham."

"We're going to call on Mr. Wynne."

"Who's Mr. Wynne, when he's at home?"

"Mr. Wynne," said Petrella, "was, until he retired, the Manager of the Exeter branch of the District Bank."

"The old boy Light and Corder assaulted."

"That's right," said Petrella. "That's where this story began. I want to hear about it, before we tackle Douglas."

It was a lovely day. The early March sun was bright, but not yet very warm. Spring was round the corner, waiting for its cue.

Wilmot abandoned the map and said, "To hell with it! You know what? You ought to do something about Jane."

"Which Jane?" said Petrella, but the car had swerved a full foot to the right before he corrected it.

"Is there more than one?" said Wilmot innocently. "I mean Jane Orfrey, the girl detective, the pride of the Women Police. The one I pulled out of the river a week ago."

"What do you suggest I ought to do about her?"

"You could always marry her. If the worst came to the worst, I mean."

Petrella drove in silence for nearly a quarter of a mile, and Wilmot, who knew him better than most people, began to kick himself for having presumed.

At last Petrella said, "I've never proposed to a girl. I wouldn't know how to start."

"Don't worry," said Wilmot, relieved. "It's all a matter of technique. You get in front of her, and work your feet up till you're pretty close. Then you distract her attention—and grab her with both hands. Under the arms, high up, is a favorite—"

"You make it sound like unarmed combat."

"It is a bit like that. Mind you, you'll find Jane's got a pretty high standard, now she's been kissed by a real expert."

"What expert?"

"Me," said Wilmot. "When I pulled her out of the water, I had to use the kiss-of-life technique. Smashing. It'll probably go better still when she's conscious—"

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"Certainly I remember Marchant and Corder," said Mr. Wynne. "It's such a beautiful morning. Let's step out into the garden. I have good cause to remember," he went on. "One of my ribs never really mended. I get a sharp twinge there if I stoop suddenly. Particularly when the weather is cold."

He was one of those men who look old when they are young, and young when they are old. The lines on his face were the deep lines of age, but his eyes had the brightness, his skin the pinkness, of youth. He's looked exactly like that, Petrella decided, for half a century; like a tough old tree.

"I read all about the assault those two men made on you," Petrella said, "but what interested me most was the suggestion that your refusal to grant this company credit was based on some sort of personal feeling."

"Personal feeling?" Mr. Wynne drew his lips in sharply, then puffed them out again like a goldfish after an ant's egg. "They must have imagined that. Bank Managers aren't allowed much personal discretion. All substantial overdrafts are referred to Area."

"But in this case it was suggested that you refused to recommend credit because of some sort of quarrel."

"If there was a quarrel," said Mr. Wynne, "it was very one-sided." He stared up at an airplane, from Hurn on the cross-Channel run, which was gaining height in a leisurely circle against the pale blue-green sky. "I can remember the managing director—his name was Marchant, and he'd been in the Air Force—coming to see me in my office one morning. I hadn't quite made up my mind what I was going to recommend. He wanted a very large credit, but he had reasonable security, and the company had quite a good financial record. When I said that I should need time to think about it, he got very angry." A slight smile played across the corners of Mr. Wynne's mouth. "Very angry indeed. He said that I'd promised him the credit and that I must let him have it."

"And had you?"

"Of course not," said Mr. Wynne. "Are you fond of tomatoes?"

They had drifted to the bottom of the garden. Along the fence which separated the garden from the recreation ground was quite a pretentious greenhouse. The far side was covered with wire netting.

"I have trouble with the children throwing things," explained Mr. Wynne. "Children seem to be brought up without discipline today. I have forced some early Cardinal Joys—they're pentagams, of course. Would you like to try one?"

"No, thanks," said Petrella. "You were telling me about Marchant making a scene in your office."

"Yes. He lost his temper, and threatened me. I wasn't impressed."

"When you say he threatened you

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—do you mean physically?"

"I thought at one moment that he was going to strike me. He went very red, jumped to his feet, and came round to my side of the desk." Mr. Wynne blinked.

"And what did you do?"

"I told him to control himself. After a while he did so, and went away."

"And after that you decided not to recommend him for credit."

"If you mean that I nursed a grudge against him, you're quite mistaken. I shouldn't allow my personal feelings to enter into a matter like that. It did, of course, occur to me that a man who had so little control over himself might not be the safest person to conduct a business. That big fellow there is an Ecbalium Agreste, or squirting cucumber—"

"Pickled gherkins," said Wilmot to Petrella, as they drove northward to keep a mid-day rendezvous with the Chief Constable. "Are all bank managers like that?"

"They tend to clothe themselves in the armor of their own rectitude," said Petrella. "But I should think Mr. Wynne is an extreme specimen."

"No wonder Marchant blew his top. Old Wynne would have saved the banks a few shocks in the last seven years if he'd been a bit more tactful with him, wouldn't he?"

It was nearly four o'clock when they first caught sight of Fyledean Court. They had taken the Tilshead road, across the wastelands which form the central hump of Salisbury Plain. Then they had dropped down off the escarpment, leaving behind them the barren acres of the Firing Range, back to the civilization of the Lavenham Valley. It was like coming out of war into peace.

Fyledean Court lay at the head of a long, curving, shallow valley. A private approach road ran north from the Lavenham-Devizes road through unfenced fields of stubble, sloping up to a windbreak of black and leafless trees.

At the turn of the road Petrella stopped the car.

"You walk from here," he said to Wilmot. "Keep out of sight over the crest, and work your way in from behind. Pick up anything you can, while I keep 'em busy in front."

He gave Wilmot five minutes start, then drove slowly down the road to the Court, and rang the bell. A gray-haired woman answered the door, inquired his name in a broad Wiltshire accent, and showed him into a room which might have been a gunroom or a library according to its owner's tastes. There were a lot of bookshelves, but very few books; a clutter of catalogues, boxes of cartridges, bottles of linseed oil, and tins of saddlesoap.

He sat there for nearly ten minutes, listening to the life of the house and farm going on around him. A heavy truck drove up, dis-

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charged some load, and drove off again. Then Douglas Marchant came in.

"My housekeeper tells me that you're a policeman," he said.

"Well—" began Petrella cautiously.

"Does that mean I can't offer you a drink?"

"There's no rule about it, but actually I won't have one just now."

"You don't mind if I do," said Marchant, and opened the large closet beside the fireplace. There were box files on the lower shelves, and a decanter and some bottles and glasses higher up.

Marchant helped himself to whiskey, put in a long splash of soda, and said, "Well now."

Both men were standing.

Petrella said, "I'm a Detective Inspector attached to New Scotland Yard. We've been investigating a number of bank robberies, which seemed to us to be connected—possibly organized by the same people."

"They're smart operators," said Marchant. "I've read about them in the papers."

"And I have a warrant to search your house."

Exactly the correct reactions, Petrella observed. Incredulity, followed by anger, followed by an affection of ridicule. But then, he had had ten minutes to think it all out.

"If it isn't a joke," said Marchant, "and you really do suspect me of being connected with these—these bank robberies—would you spare a few minutes telling me why? If this house is full of—er—stolen goods—they'll still be here in ten minutes' time. Incidentally, I suppose that's one of your men I spotted, leaning over the gate at the back."

Petrella said, "Did you know a man named Light?"

"Jerry Light? Certainly. He was my Squadron Sergeant-Major during the war, and came in with me when I started a demolition and scrap metal business after the war."

"Have you seen him since."

"I see him whenever we happen to work on the same contracts. He supplies labor. I supply windows."

"When did you see him last?"

"Two days ago—in London."

"Why did you meet him in an out-of-the-way public house, and not at his office?"

"I do much more of my work in public houses than in offices."

"I don't suppose you met Baron von der Hulde in a public house?"

Marchant looked surprised. "You keep dodging about," he complained. "I thought we were talking about poor old Jerry."

"*Poor* old Jerry," said Petrella softly.

"You must know—he was killed—a motor smash. The night before last."

"I knew," said Petrella. "I was wondering how you did. It hasn't been in the newspapers."

"One of his employees told a business friend of mine. These

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things get round very quickly in the trade."

"I'm sure they do," said Petrella. "Does everybody in the building trade also know that if Light hadn't been killed, he would have been charged with murder?"

Marchant stood up, his face went red and he said, "If that's a joke, it's in poor taste. I've told you, Light was a friend of mine—"

"So was the man he shot. Alex Shaw."

"Alex—"

"Or am I wrong? Wasn't it you who found Alex the job as chauffeur to your sister, Constantia?"

"Certainly. But—"

"Into whose hands, incidentally, quite a few stolen banknotes seem to have found their way."

"You're confusing me," said Marchant. "And you're going much too fast. You talk about Jerry Light, and the Baron von der Hulde, and my sister Constantia, and her chauffeur Alex, and stolen banknotes. Are you telling me that Alex was a bank robber?"

"Alex was a very rare bird," said Petrella. One half of his mind was occupied with what he was saying. The other half was noticing that Marchant was still standing up, and had put down his empty whiskey glass on the table. "He was a professional killer. Not just a muscle man, like Franks and Stoker. and the other simple hooligans Light employed to run your dirty business for you."

"*My* business?"

"Yes. *Your* business. And that's really the oddest twist in the whole affair. Because, as far as I can see, you made bank robbery your business from motives of personal spite. You once had a good, legitimate business, and a bank killed it, so you decided to get your own back on all banks."

Marchant walked over to the closet, which still stood half open, took out the decanter, poured himself out a second whiskey, and then said politely, "Please go on."

"There's not a lot more to it. You were well placed, of course. As a demolition expert you knew all there was to be known about cutting through brickwork and steel. Light, I imagine, was your contact with the professional criminal element. You supplied the equipment, mostly from Germany, organized the whole show, and took—" Petrella's eye wandered round the room for a moment—"I would guess, a very handsome share of the profits."

Marchant said, "Is that your curtain line? I'm sorry. Really I am. I haven't met anything more fascinating since I stopped reading comics. Now—get on with your search, apologize, and be off with you."

The door opened, and Wilmot looked in.

"Sorry to interrupt," he said. "But I thought you ought to have this at once," and he thrust a piece of paper into Petrella's hand.

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Petrella read it and said, "Thank you, Sergeant. Don't go away." And to Marchant, "That potato drill *that's just been delivered.* When you declared it at the Customs, did you tell them about the other piece of machinery?"

"What other piece?"

"Sergeant Wilmot hasn't had time to make a close examination, but he says that there appears to be a second piece of machinery screwed to the framework, inside the larger piece, and painted to resemble it. It looks like a high-speed metal drill. Curious requirement for a farmer."

"If there is, I know nothing about it."

"It would be an excellent way of bringing stuff into the country. You'd need some cooperation from the German manufacturer, of course."

"On a level," said Marchant, 'with your other fairy stories." But he was sweating.

He's getting ready to jump, thought Petrella. But which way? There are two of us here, now. I'm nearer the window. Wilmot's between him and the door.

"If you'd care to look at the declaration I made to the Customs—" He opened the closet door, and took out one of the box files. The whole of the back of the closet hinged inward. Marchant went through it, and slammed the door behind him.

Petrella jumped at the same moment, but he was a fraction of a second too late. The closet door was shut, and immovable.

"Out into the passage," he said.

Wilmot grabbed the handle, and pulled, but the door held fast. The mechanism at the back of the closet must have bolted the passage door as well.

"Damn it," said Petrella. "He had that lined up, didn't he?" As he spoke, he was looking round for a weapon. There was a poker in the grate, but it was too small to be much use. He opened another closet and found a twelve-bore gun in it. He made sure that it was unloaded, then grabbed it by the barrel and swung the butt at the window.

It was a narrow, leaded casement, and it took five minutes to beat an opening through it. Wilmot went first, and dragged Petrella after him. As they reached the farmyard they heard the airplane, and saw it taxi-ing out of the Dutch barn two hundred yards away.

"It's a Piper Aztec," said Wilmot. "Lovely little job. I spotted her as I came in. Take off and land on a tennis court."

"We ought to have thought of that," said Petrella. "With his record—an airplane was the obvious thing."

They could only stand and watch. The silver toy swung round, nose into the wind; a sudden burst of power, and it was away.

"We'll try the telephone, but I

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don't mind betting it's disconnected. The whole thing was laid out like a military operation. He went twice to that closet. Twice, *in front of my eyes*, to put me off my guard."

The plane was circling to gain height, and swung back almost overhead.

"Once he gets to Germany we can whistle for him. Come on."

Wilmot didn't seem to hear him. He was still staring after the dwindling plane. "He won't get to Germany," he said. "I emptied his main tank. There'll be enough in the starter tank and Autovac to get him airborne. He'll be lucky if he gets as far as the coast."

The dipping sun touched the starboard wingtip of the plane, and a tiny spark of light winked back at them.

Petrella cut out the clipping from the *New Forest Advertiser*, and pasted it carefully into the scrapbook.

UNEXPLAINED FATALITY

The Piper Aztec two-seater aircraft, registration G/XREZ, which crashed on Tuesday evening a Christchurch has now been identified. The pilot, who died in the crash, was Wing Commander Marchant, D.S.O., D.F.C., of Fyledear Court, who has been farming in the Devizes locality for some years. Wing Commander Marchant was a popular figure locally and a generous contributor to all Service charities.

The cause of the accident has not yet been ascertained, but eyewitness accounts speak of the engine having cut out, which would suggest a mechanical defect or fuel stoppage. The pilot was evidently trying to land the aircraft on the local recreation ground. Tragically, he failed in the attempt by a few yards only and crashed in the back garden of a Christchurch resident, Mr. Alfred Wynne, a retired Bank Official. Mr Wynne's extensive tomato and cucumber house was entirely demolished.

This appeared the same day Petrella announced his engagement to Jane Orfrey.

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A suspected *murder* weapon DISAPPEARS — and the D.A. *swears* to put Perry in SAN QUENTIN!

5. The Case of the **AMOROUS AUNT**
Lorraine Elmore *vows* she is innocent. But SHE has a motive — and ONLY SHE was a *witness!*

6. The Case of the **STEPDAUGHTER'S SECRET**
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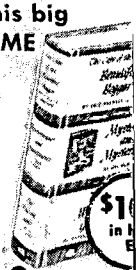

7 The Case of t
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Then, the shock

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